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ESSAYS ON
POETRY AND POETS

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ESSAYS
ON
POETRY AND POETS

BY THE
HON. RODEN NOEL

AUTHOR OF
"A LITTLE CHILD'S MONUMENT," "SONGS OF THE HEIGHTS AND DEEPS,"
"HOUSE OF RAVENSBURG," ETC.

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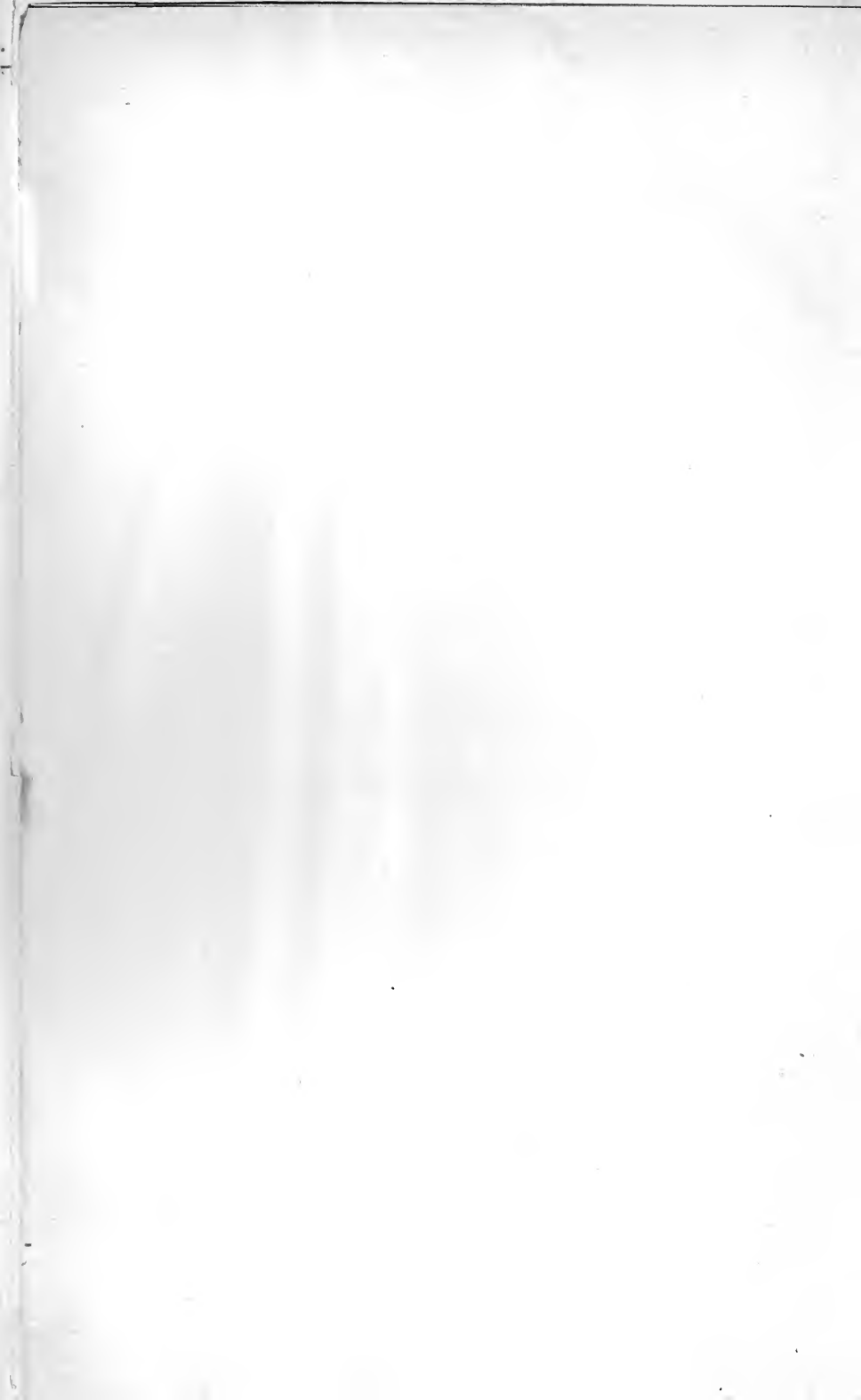
TO MY FRIEND

JOHN ADDINGTON SYMONDS,

POET, ESSAYIST, HISTORIAN,

IN MEMORY OF "AULD LANG SYNE,"

I DEDICATE THIS BOOK.



P R E F A C E .



THESE Essays, with all their faults, were carefully composed, but, since a few of them were written some time ago, all have been scrupulously revised, the information involved, moreover, being brought, as far as possible, up to date: those that are republished have also been occasionally altered, in accordance with modified conviction on the part of the writer; others are recent, and published now for the first time.

All deal with modern, romantic poetry. The keynote of more than one of them is to be found in my opening essay on the "Poetic Interpretation of Nature," for a very marked characteristic of the best poetry of our century is the worship, and faithful, though idealized, delineation of external nature. In the last paper I print an experience of English travel, because, though hardly indeed covered by the book's designation, it forms a kind of return to this "dominant theme," being an attempt of my own at some measure of that descriptive interpretation, the general principles of which I have discussed in my first paper; this is a record of the experience on which was partly founded my poem "Thalatta," in "Songs of the Heights and Deeps."

The only poet not of our century included in the present

volume is Chatterton. My brief essay on him appeared many years ago, but I quite agree with Mr. Theodore Watts, who has an excellent (and comparatively recent) introductory article on him in Ward's "British Poets," that, young as he was, Chatterton may be regarded as the father of that revived romantic poetry, now established amongst us.

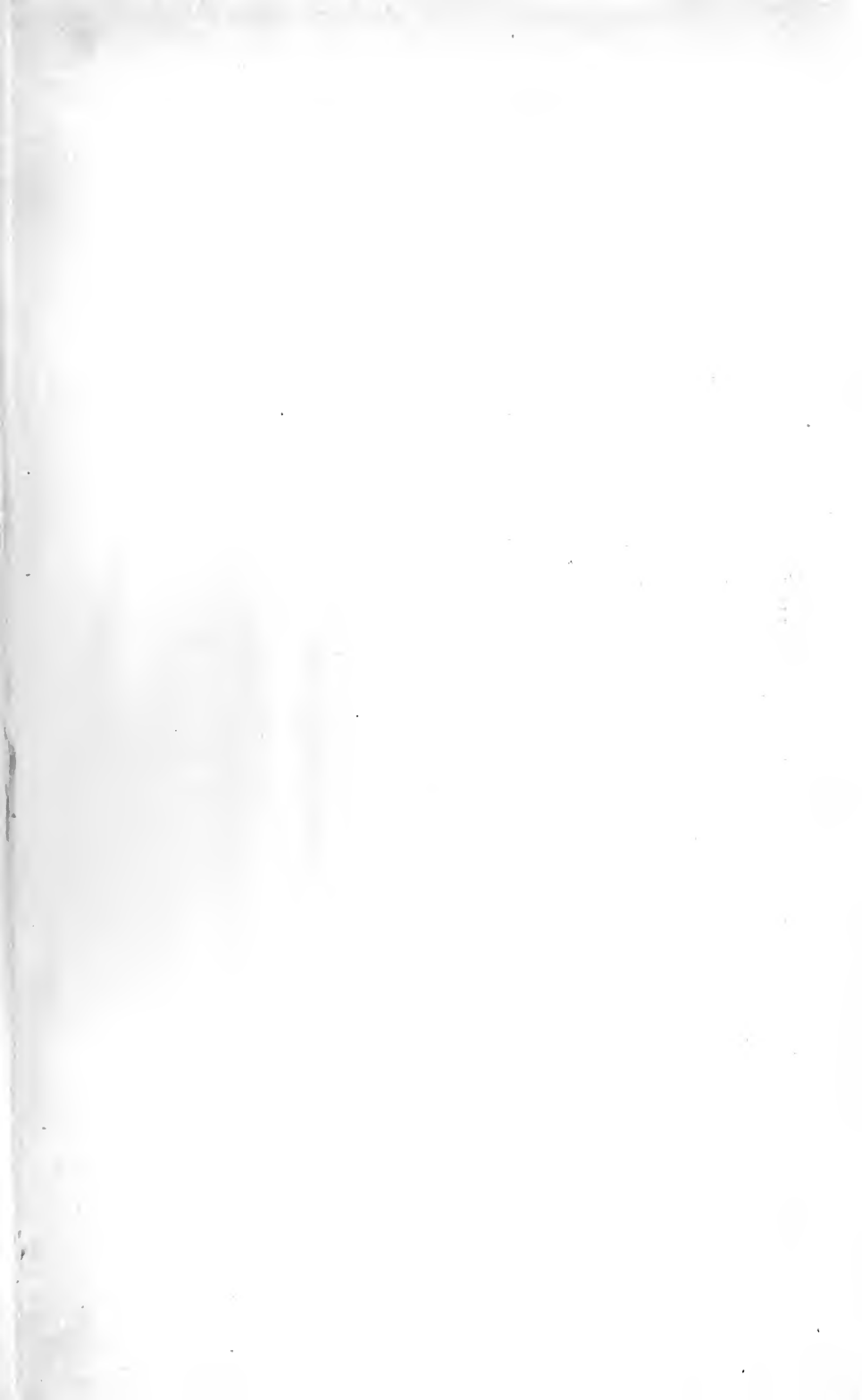
The other more pronounced characteristics of the poets here discussed are, I think, generally speaking, broad and deep human sympathies, a salient and original personality, strength and sincerity of feeling and conviction, as well as some poetic distinction of utterance, or *style*, whether that be rugged and robust, or subtle, delicate, and refined. Between Chatterton and Byron, I could have wished to say a word on Blake, and Burns, poets, each in his way, so genuine, simple, sincere, and distinguished; nor ought Coleridge, and Mrs. Browning to have been forgotten. But, alas! "Hell is paved with good intentions."

My thanks are due to the proprietors of the *Contemporary*, *Fortnightly*, *British Quarterly*, and *Indian Reviews*, as also to those of the *Spectator*, *Macmillan's*, and *Gentleman's Magazines*, for permission to reprint essays, which, however, while originally appearing in their columns, have been very considerably altered, not only as regards form, but also in respect of substance.

R. N.

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ESSAYS ON POETRY AND POETS.



ON THE POETIC INTERPRETATION OF NATURE.

I CANNOT follow that fine poet and critic, Matthew Arnold, in his apparent depreciation of Nature-poetry, when he dismisses Shelley as the poet of clouds and sunsets, and says he had not got hold of the right subject-matter for poetry. It is distinctively a modern subject, no doubt; but, I should have thought, one newly reclaimed for beneficent poetic ends,—so much more fertile possession made over to the Muse, in addition to that purely human interest which has been hers from of old.

I believe that Rousseau, Wordsworth, Byron, Shelley, Keats, Coleridge, were verily prophets, to whom a new revelation was entrusted. In a time when all secrets were at length supposed to be laid bare before man's microscopic understanding, all superstitions exploded, all mysteries explained; when the universe emptied of ancient awe seemed no longer venerable, but a hideous lazar-house rather, made visible to all human eyes in every ghastly corner of it; before the Circe-wand of materialism, Love metamorphosed into a sensation, Man shrivelled to a handful of dust, the Body of God's own breathing world

with familiar irreverence laid upon the board of some near-sighted professor to be dissected ; when the angels of Faith and Hope seemed to be deserting for ever the desecrated shrines of mankind—then it was that these Prophet-Poets, as very ministers of Heaven, pointed men to the World-Soul, commanding them once more to veil their faces before the swift subtle splendour of Universal Life. The moods of Nature do mysteriously respond to the moods of Man. To the sensitive spirit the sea, the mountains, and the stars are very types and symbols of permanence, order, eternity. Nature and man are elder sister and younger brother ; she wakes intelligence and will in him ; he knows himself in knowing her. She seems to him a dumb and blind elder sister, whose laws inexorably bind him, while he imposes himself upon her, reading spiritual meanings in her face. The chaos of our own soul, individual human degradation, of which we in the midst can but dimly divine the issue, receives a mystic interpretation from what seems the unconscious innocence of a sphere which yet manifests evil and good, strength and weakness—though, withal, the grand universality of a Kosmos. Thence we can look up with greater trust than before even for the worms that “sting one another in the dust.”

Why do the Arab in the desert, the Persian on his mountain, bow before the all-beholding sun? In him is no sin, no vanity, falsehood, or vain ambition, himself the veritable incarnation of one invisible Sun. He who loses his own personality in Nature, who lays down before her, the universal mother and tomb of humanity, his own private wrongs and griefs and fevered aspirations, hereby redresses the balance so unduly weighted with the self-will and momentary longings of one restless man. For she is one who toils not nor dreams, errs not nor supposes, raves not nor repents, but calmly fulfils herself for ever.

In her general aspects, Nature, if we do not peer too closely into the minutiae of her painful strife and struggle,

looks inevitable and calm, not in perpetual spiritual conflict like ourselves; and hence she seems to offer *rest* to those who love her. The harmony of inviolable laws appears in her coöperant to an end. But I think that this inevitableness of a universal order implicitly involves the idea of rightness, that of some fulfilled obligation tinged with morality, or what is akin to it. I know this cannot be proved, but I think it may be felt.

The individual, in so far as he can assert himself against, or regard himself as out of relation with, the whole Kosmos, is wrong, evil; but in harmony with all he is right. And though, indeed, external nature may be really composed of individuals, yet if it be so, we are not, except in some small degree as respects the animal world, in the secret of their subjectivity, and therefore cannot know them for such. Intelligences who should be unable to put themselves in conscious communication with ours might well regard human bodies as part of a fixed order of inflexible laws, without private volition or caprice, just as we now regard the inorganic. For even by ourselves private volitions are capable of being reduced to a law of averages through statistical science, which points to a real eternal order beyond and beneath our discords, resolving them into harmony. And however this be, to merge our personality in quiet or rapturous contemplation of a universal natural order proves indeed heavenly relief from the too often intolerable burden of an isolated self-life.

All that is profound, eternal, impersonal in us, goes forth to wed with the profound, eternal, impersonal Heart of all. It is beyond our good and right, more than our ideal, yet justifies, sanctions, transcends, absorbs it. Universal Nature, who is one with us, constitutes, nourishes, creates us; while we in her constitute, nourish, create ourselves, one another, and her. If it be true that we form her in our image, it is also true that from her we derive the power so to form her; we are her creatures, living in and

by her. Verily, it is our *privilege* to know conflict, and bewilderingly to realize some fundamental inner freedom, which is more than mere inanimate law; but the seemingly inanimate order is a revelation of still higher privilege—that of inevitable Will, at one with unhesitating Wisdom; and this surely is the inmost verity of things, our defect and disharmony being but an isolated chord in the grand music.

Therefore, I repeat: "the light that never was on sea or land, the consecration and the poet's dream," is indeed a new revelation, made peculiarly in the modern poetry of true spiritual insight, and of this Poetry of Nature Wordsworth is the High Priest. Not only does it pour fresh illuminating light upon Nature herself, but it also deepens and enlarges our comprehension of man. By means of their analogues in Nature, the human heart and mind may be more profoundly understood. Human emotions win a double dearness, or an added sorrow from their fellowship and association with outward scenes. While Nature can be fathomed only through her analogies with the desires, fears, and aspirations of the human soul, these again can scarcely become defined and articulate save through the mystic and multiform appearances of Nature. We have here then a new poetic product of priceless value; neither the external scene alone, nor man alone, but rather some spiritual child of their espousals.

It is really almost puerile nowadays to suppose that there is an absolute Nature, which science and the land-surveyor are alone competent correctly to know—while poetry invents a world of her own wherewith to amuse herself and other people. Spiritual imagination alone knows Nature; I don't say *adequately*, even she—but with any approach to adequacy; though, of course, the common constitution of our senses and understanding presents to us an external world which, so far as superficial characteristics are concerned, is pretty well the same for all, and which

Nature
&
Man

quite sufficiently serves the purposes alike of science, of common intercourse, and of practical utility. But since Berkeley, Kant, and modern physiology, it is no longer permissible to doubt that even these superficial qualities, and what we call "laws of nature," are merely the interpretation which our sensible and mental constitution enables us to put upon the language of the Kosmos, wherein a great deal more is meant than meets the ear. Of course, one must be insane to deny that the sea is a vast quantity of salt water, or that a primrose is indeed a yellow primrose, as Peter Bell with his plain common sense assumes it to be. But it is quite compatible with sanity to believe that both sea and primrose are a great deal more also. Only one must have other faculties, or faculties more highly trained, to discern the more. Poetry does not tell pretty lies for the sake of amusement, but penetrates to the heart of things. Therefore, I cannot altogether agree with Mr. Ruskin about "pathetic fallacy,"—although no doubt there *is* a "false" way of looking at things as well as a true. The nimble fancy may suggest mere points of superficial resemblance, hardly vital or essential to the objects, which the poet endows with animation and soul, rather perhaps conveying an erroneous conception of their proper and peculiar character. So far I can agree; but what I urge is, that to endow them with animation and soul is not necessarily to falsify; may rather be to see more to the very root of them. I don't pretend that the poet speaks with precise accuracy in his metaphors and similes, but he suggests an inner truth of things, to which the unimagina- tive are simply blind. Indeed, precise accuracy belongs to the region of the understanding, which is by itself incapable of the higher truth. So that when Mr. Arnold tells us to conceive dogmas in the light of poetry, if he means with elasticity, in no hard and fast, cast-iron fashion, I can follow; but if he means as mere graceful, unvarnished fables, I cannot.

For instance, nothing could be more realistically descriptive than Wordsworth's magnificent lines on the Yew-trees of Borrowdale :—

“ each particular trunk a growth
Of intertwined fibres serpentine
Upcoiling, and inveterately convolved ;”

but the imaginative touches are equally true ; nay, penetrate more to the heart of things :—

“ Nor uninformed with phantasy, and looks
That threaten the profane ;”

Then those wonderful personifications—less fanciful than Shelley's in “ Adonais,” but more imaginative—how deep they go, how grand and solemn the mystery they unveil !—

“ beneath whose sable roof
. ghostly shapes
May meet at noontide ; Fear and trembling Hope,
Silence and Foresight ; Death the skeleton,
And Time the shadow.”

To meditative imagination, in the umbrageous atmosphere of the yew-trees, these august Presences verily abide—more actually than their ancient boughs with coral berries. The cuckoo is no mere cuckoo, but “ a wandering voice ;” a voice of dear memories, and coming summer. “ Yellow bees in the ivy bloom ” are to the poet “ forms more real than living man, nurslings of immortality.” Nay, those outer things are because these inner realities are ; the former would not be without the latter—they are images and shadows only ; the leaping lamb is on earth because the Lamb of God is in Heaven, in the inner Holy of Holies of Humanity. Light is in the sense, in outer space, because Light is in the spirit, in the understanding. The perishing bread that sustains the body is by virtue of the Bread of Life. To the opened inner eye there is indeed a Real Presence in the elements of the Eucharist.

I do not mean to say that the animism of savages is a correct creed, for they simply deify phenomena without

analysis, or suspicion that these are largely subjective ; nor even do I say that the Pagan poets were correct in their mythological beliefs ; or the mediævals in their fairy-lore ; yet I think they were not far from the truth when they formulated their conviction that our spiritual kinship with Nature testifies to some spiritual beings like ourselves behind the phenomena of Nature—the elements, and so-called inanimate objects, being only their expression, body, or vesture. Nor do I deem such a belief at all incompatible with a full recognition of that ever-widening kingdom of physical law, to which modern Science introduces us : only let Science “stick to her own last !” Quite certainly the ancients were never guilty of deliberately, in cold blood, inventing a quasi-poetic, or metaphorical diction, which the vulgar were so foolish as to take for literal fact, as our pseudo-scientific insincerity of unbelief, and incapacity for comprehending other modes of thought and feeling, now complacently assume. On the contrary, modern Nature-poetry is reverting, though in its own fashion, and in accordance with other altered convictions of our age, to this primal conception of the ancients. For as Science—though furnishing in her fairy tales new material for poetry—affords no help to the poetic feeling of life and spirit in Nature, so neither does a theology which teaches that there is a God external to the world, who once made, and still possibly sustains it. Poetry demands God immanent in Man and Nature. So that the author of Ecclesiastical Sonnets, the High Priest of this special poetry, yet hesitating and bewildered by his dogmatic creed, as by his habit of inherited thought, startles us out of our propriety by exclaiming :—

“Great God ! I’d rather be
 A Pagan suckled in a creed outworn,
 So might I, standing on this pleasant lea,
 Have glimpses that would make me less forlorn ;
 Have sight of Proteus rising from the sea ;
 Or hear old Triton blow his wreathèd horn !”

But the philosophy of idealism supplies for the logical faculty the conception needed to lift it into some harmony with the vision of children, poets, and the more primitive, less sophisticated races. Wordsworth, however, and Coleridge seem scarcely to dare credit what to the inmost core of them they feel true. You will remember the strange passage, in one of Coleridge's philosophical poems, where he apologizes to his wife for giving utterance to his conviction! Schiller, in his "Gods of Greece," makes a melancholy lament over their extinction. And I confess that, dearly as I love Mrs. Browning, her poem in reply to Schiller appears to me in all respects the least felicitous of her works. Pan is not dead—save in this sense—that God manifest in Nature is now, since the revelation of our Blessed Lord Jesus Christ, felt to be less worshipful than God manifest in Divine Humanity. There would seem to be three elements, which, combined, create the world as we know it—the God in Man, the God in Nature, and the Defect in both. We and the world have a common reason, and a common heart, or we could not know the world. The richer and deeper our own life, the more can we enter into the life of the world; and the more fully we enter into that, the more universal and profound becomes our own. Not only is our mental life developed through perception, but physiology shows the close correlation of our external and internal lives, so that without the nourishment and sustainment of our bodies by earth and sun, our soul-life in its present form would be impossible. Yet the Divine Reality is deeper than plummet of human understanding ever sounded: eye hath not seen, nor ear heard. The outer world is but symbol and parable, the imperfect self-manifestation to our defective apprehension of eternal Ideas, which are substantial. That is a truth familiar to mystics of all ages, which in recent times has been virtually re-stated by two notable teachers, one a man of science, James Hinton, the other a theologian, Cardinal Newman.

The world, says Hinton, seems to us dead, only on account of our own deadness. And therefore, in proportion as we are made alive, will the life of the world become manifest to us. Therefore also I conceive Wordsworth's position in the immortal "Ode on Immortality" to be thoroughly justified. Fresh from the Fountain of his being, the Child-spirit sees most truly. The gleam of the sanctuary is upon him, and around

"Meadow, grove, and stream,
The earth, and every common sight,
To him do seem,
Apparelled in celestial light,
The glory and the freshness of a dream."

"Heaven lies about us in our infancy!
Shades of the prison-house begin to close
Upon the growing Boy.

* * * * *

The Youth, who daily farther from the east
Must travel, still is Nature's priest,
And by the vision splendid
Is on his way attended;
At length the Man perceives it die away,
And fade into the light of common day."

But—

"The clouds that gather round the setting sun
Doth take a sober colouring from an eye
That hath kept watch o'er man's mortality;

* * * * *

Thanks to the human heart by which we live,
Thanks to its tenderness, its joys, and fears,
To me the meanest flower that blows can give
Thoughts that do often lie too deep for tears."

The Child-spirit is alone immortal; yet the Divine Child in his eternal youth looks often forth from the sadder and wiser eyes of man. The old mystics believed that when Adam and Eve sinned, the gods or angels they talked with became hidden from them, and appeared to them as trees and flowers, and common earth or sky,—beautiful indeed, but hardly animate, and they quite unable to hold intelligent converse with them as before.

To Blake the sun was no mere ball of fiery vapours, but a glorious company of the Heavenly Host praising God. Yet to me it appears that James Hinton was wrong in his assumption that Man alone is fallen or defective, while Nature remains perfect. The impression one derives is rather that we have shared in her fall, or she in ours. Between us there can be no such chasm. Nay, she is "red in tooth and claw with ravine." A formidable indictment, indeed, has been drawn up against her in the outraged names of justice and of love! She has her moods as we have—good and evil, grave and gay, desolate and happy, cruel and kind, terrible and gentle, while we respond to her varying humour according to our own. Hence it is that poets interpret her differently, according to their own characters. The grand and gloomy, the Titanic and diabolic, find their expression in Byron, but the tranquil and tender chiefly in Wordsworth. I really do not think there is much "pathetic fallacy" in the ascription by poets of their own moods to Nature. It is rather that in these dominant moods of theirs they are able to feel the corresponding note in Nature. There is indeed in her, as there is also in ourselves, a deep foundation of tranquillity and calm under all the roaring and unrest of her loud waves—a region of repose, an inner haven of peace; and the profoundest poet abides, or is anchored there, however he may be tossed to and fro on the upper surge. And very often have her loud pæans of rejoicing been felt by the sorrowful to be out of harmony with their sorrow. Or again, the overflowing, multitudinous joy of her springs and summers may carry consolation and conviction that all is well, into the arid recesses of a mourner's heart. Or once again, the dreariness and desolation of her dark seas and shores, her mountains and barren plains, may unbearably overwhelm an already overburdened soul.

I have admitted with Mr. Ruskin that there is a false and vicious metaphorical diction used by poetasters, in-

sincerely, as a kind of "current coin;" frigid conceits, cold artifices of mere talent, or mere jingling babble for effect, from which precisely Wordsworth came to deliver us.

A true poet is ever a loving and faithful observer of the external features and deportment of his mistress. But just because his look is the long look of a lover—no passing glance—he sees more than that. Real feeling, I hold, must put us into some vital relation with the actuality of things, though the expression of it may be but a tentative striving to body forth the truth about them. Thus, when Kingsley, in his beautiful ballad, "The Sands of Dee," calls the foam of the wave that drowned Mary "cruel," though, indeed, the foam itself may not be cruel, he gives utterance to a feeling that is inevitable, and therefore, in all probability, justified; for behind those engulfing seas there surely must be some pitiless and murderous power, some prince, or princes, of a world that "lieth in the wicked," however that power may be directed and overruled by a Paternal Master-Love. And when Keats, in describing the slow movement of spent shredding foam along the back of a heavy wave, characterizes it by the phrase "wayward indolence," he fixes and determines the idiosyncrasy of this movement in a manner simply impossible to a poet who should either fail to perceive, or else resolve not to allow himself the language of analogy. There is some occult identity between spent foam and our "wayward indolence."

The heart of Wordsworth beats in sympathy with the sea's when he sings—

"Listen! the mighty being is awake,
And doth with his eternal motion make
A sound like thunder everlastingly."

The great Apocalypse of Dante is one colossal translation of the inner truths of heart and soul into the corresponding imagery and environment of sense. When Milton calls the boat that wrecked Lycidas—

“That fatal and perfidious bark,
Built in the eclipse and rigg'd with curses dark,
That sunk so low that sacred head of thine.”

how unliteral, inaccurate, and true to the inmost fact is he! “Stone him with hardened hearts, harder than stones,” sings Shakespeare in “Lucrece.” Stones are hard because hearts are, not hearts hard because stones are, though that is not the common opinion. To arrive at the true spiritual order, you must reverse the order of experience. Metaphor is the interpretation of one thing through another. And one thing *is* through another. Seeing it as isolated, we see it, through our own defect, imperfectly. It ever fulfils itself by analogy, developed and discerned, as by passing on into some other phase or form of existence. Everything is a Proteus. But as Keats attributes the bright mail of fish to the kisses of lovers, Wordsworth assigns to Duty the guardianship of the Ancient Heavens, and the laughter of fragrant flowers. Nor is this graceful falsehood, but vital truth.

We have in “The Thorn”—not, on the whole, a very inspired poem—some minute, faithful description, characteristic of Wordsworth. His graphic delineations of landscape place a vivid imagery before the sense, which must ever be dear to true lovers of Nature, dearer than the often vaguer and more confused reminiscences, or too phantasmal, nebulous, and unarticulated, however gorgeous, inventions of Shelley. But still the imaginative touch in that poem goes deeper than all the realism—

“And she is known to every star,
And every wind that blows.”

Yet if that is false, if it hints not, in the only or best way possible, at a vital reality, why should it give peculiar delight? Can what is known to be the most utterly fantastic and irrational element in the whole composition boast such a prerogative? Surely not, though it be quite unnecessary to define this imaginative truth more precisely. Again,

do we not thank our poet when he calls the Wye "thou wanderer through the woods," and tells us of the Thames "wandering at its own sweet will?"

Shelley is hardly so close an observer as Wordsworth; or, when he is so, his observation is more limited in range. It is a dissolving view of cloud, and wood, and water, and flower. While Wordsworth spiritualizes the results of loving observation, Shelley rather etherealizes vague impressions, as of trance or dream. The former is like an inductive philosopher, setting in order—indeed, often transfiguring into sacred glory—common experience; the latter like a schoolman of the Middle Ages, expatiating in phenomena deduced *à priori* from his inner consciousness.

While Shelley volatilizes sense, Wordsworth conducts us through its homely portal into a heavenlier and more abiding realm. Wordsworth and Byron, Antæus-like, win new strength from contact with Mother Earth. I love Shelley too well to compare him with Icarus, or with Phaeton; for, if he does not soar with us to the highest, he flies with us through a very lovely, however insubstantial, dreamland of his own fair vision.*

How should the uncertain motion of mist about a mountain be defined better than by the lines of Wordsworth?—

"Such gentle mists as glide,
Curling *with unconfirmed intent*
On that green mountain-side."

Whatever corresponds to that "unconfirmed intent," the kinship there is in the mist to the more vital and essential characteristics of the human soul, this surely is as much there as mechanical laws of motion in space, which are themselves but systematized perceptions of our sensuous understanding, though doubtless corresponding to some

* But I have just read Mr. Stopford Brooke's introduction to Shelley, which, so far as I know, is assuredly the most pregnant and illuminating criticism of him extant. The comparison of his nature-poetry with that of Wordsworth deserves careful study.

reality of sensuous perception outside ; but the very essence of those material qualities is that they are distantly akin, that they are mysteriously symbolical of more human, more intellectual, more ethical behaviour. For, as Schelling and Coleridge pointed out, a symbol is itself the superior being under inferior conditions : it is the higher essence, one may say, deprived of its ethereal vesture, and become incarnate, yet radiant still, and redolent of veiled Divinity.

As regards the dramatic interpretation of Man and Nature through mutual influence upon one another, what would the Leechgatherer in Wordsworth's poem be without the "lonely moor?" They coalesce to one moving image. In the meditative imagination of the poet the poor contented old man becomes transfigured, and appears as a heavenly minister, an angel from God, sent to console him, upon whom weighed "the weary burden, and the mystery of all this unintelligible world." Often indeed does the meditative rapture of Shelley and Wordsworth pass into a kind of mystic disembodiment before the face of Nature ; they are caught up into some third heaven, where sense-limits are confounded, and our poor earth-language falters "with the burden of an honour unto which she was not born." What would the wonderful pathos of "Michael" be without the unfinished sheepfold, or the equally wonderful pathos of "Margaret" without the neglected garden, once so trim, the red stains and tufts of wool on the corner-stone of the cottage porch, where the sheep were now permitted to come and "couch unheeded?"

In that loveliest of lyrics, "Three years she grew," we have the picture of Lucy, to whom Nature was "law and impulse," "an overseeing power to kindle or restrain," to whom the cloud lent state, and the willow grace ; into whose face from the rivulets passed "beauty, born of murmuring sound," to whom belonged "the silence and the calm of mute insensate things." Remember too that beautiful passage in "The Excursion," where the old man corrects the

wanderer's despondency by pointing him to the spear-grass on the wall, with the dew on it, as testifying to the clear-hearted peace that abides in the bosom of things.

There is the magical poem about the boy, into whose heart a voice of mountain torrents was borne, in those intervals of blowing mimic hootings to the owls, under the starlight, by the lake; there is the dancing of the poet's heart with the daffodils, and that picture in "Nutting," wherein "the green and mossy bower, deformed and sullied, patiently gave up its quiet being." The voices of sea, mountain torrent, and forest, are indeed the voice of Liberty, as Coleridge in the Ode, Wordsworth in the Sonnet, and Longfellow in the "Slave's Dream" declare. Every flower "enjoys the air it breathes;" the budding twigs spread out their fan "to catch the breezy air," and can we doubt that there is pleasure? We ought indeed "to move among the shades with gentleness of heart, and with gentle hand touch, for there is a spirit in the woods." In all sobriety, it is true that what the poet saw in the Simplon Pass was "like the workings of one mind, features of one face, characters of the great Apocalypse;" in all sobriety it is true that Nature

"can so inform
The mind that is within us, so impress
With quietness and beauty, and so feed
With lofty thoughts, that neither evil tongues,
Rash judgments, nor the sneers of selfish men,
Nor greetings where no kindness is, nor all
The dreary intercourse of daily life,
Shall e'er prevail against us, or disturb
Our cheerful faith, that all which we behold
Is full of blessings.

"While with an eye made quiet by the power
Of harmony, and the deep power of joy,
We see into the life of things."

Now if there be a great fundamental principle, the slow recognition of which by modern art we owe to Mr. Ruskin, it is this, that "nothing can be good or useful or ultimately

pleasurable which is untrue." (Modern Painters, vol. iii. p. 160.) Yet here, he proceeds, in metaphor and pathetic fallacy, "is something pleasurable in written poetry which is nevertheless untrue." For, according to him, these forms of thought result from the "extraordinary or false appearances of things to us, when we are under the influence of emotion or contemplative fancy—false appearances, as being entirely unconnected with any real power or character in the object, and only imputed to it by us" (p. 159). Mr. Ruskin further adds, that "the greatest poets do not often admit this kind of falseness—that it is only the second order of poets who much delight in it." Yet he admits that "if we think over our favourite poetry we shall find it full of this kind of fallacy, and that we like it all the more for being so." Now there is here a contradiction which is well worthy of attentive examination. This attribution by metaphor of spiritual qualities to material objects is eminently characteristic of modern poetry—notably of Tennyson's—and has been made a ground of serious objection to it, as fatal to any claim it might put forward to be accounted first-rate, by more than one critic following in the wake of Mr. Ruskin. And so far as such criticism has been a protest against the indiscriminating admiration for mere pretty disconnected freaks of fancy, which at one time threatened to break up our poetry into so many foam-wreaths of loose luxuriant images, the effect of it has been beneficial. There is danger, on the other hand, that this criticism may beget a blind dogmatism, very injurious to the natural and healthy development of the poetic art which may be proper to our own present age. For the intellectual and æsthetic developments of each different race and age will have a characteristic individuality of their own. And criticism ought to point us to the great models of the past, not that we may become their cold and servile imitators, but that we may nourish on them our own creative genius. The classification of artists as first, second,

and third rate, must always be somewhat arbitrary ; but the criticism which disposes of a quality that is essential to such poetry as Tennyson's, by calling it a weakness and a "note" of inferiority, may itself be suspected of shallowness.

Let us examine a little more closely that instance of metaphor which Mr. Ruskin takes from Keats :—

"Down whose green back the short-lived foam, all hoar,
Bursts gradual with a *wayward indolence*."

Now, salt water cannot be either wayward or indolent ; on this plain fact the charge of falsehood in the metaphor is grounded. Yet this expression is precisely the most exquisite bit in the picture. Can plain falsehood then be truly poetic and beautiful? Many people will reply, "certainly," believing that poetry is essentially pleasing by the number of pretty falsehoods told or suggested. I believe with Mr. Ruskin that poetry is only good in proportion to its truth. Now, we must first inquire what the poet is here intending to describe. If a scientific man were to explain to us the nature of foam by telling us that it is a wayward and indolent thing, this would clearly be a falsehood. But does the poet profess to explain what the man of science would profess to explain, or something else? What are the physical laws according to which water becomes foam, and foam falls along the back of a wave—that is one question ; and what impression does this condition of things produce on a mind that observes closely, and feels with exquisite delicacy of sense the beauty in the movement of the foam, and its subtle relations to other material things, as well as to certain analogues in the sphere of spirit, to functions and states of the human spirit—this is a totally different question. I submit that the office of the poet in this connection is to answer the latter question, and that of the scientific man to answer the former. But observe that this is not granting licence of scientific ignorance or wanton inaccuracy to the poet which some critics are disposed to grant. For if the poet ignorantly or wantonly contradicts

such results of scientific inquiry as are generally familiar to the cultivated minds of his age, he puts himself out of harmony with them, and does not announce truth, which can commend itself to them as such. But the poetic aspects of a circumstance do not disappear when the circumstance is regarded according to the fresh light scientific inquiry has thrown upon it. Such poetic aspects are increased as knowledge increases. Keats, in this instance, contradicts no legitimate scientific conclusion. The poet who does so wantonly, shows little of the true poet's reverence for Nature. The poet undertakes to teach what the man of science does not undertake to teach: their provinces are different; but if they contradict one another, they are so far bunglers in their respective trades.

One source of error in this matter is, that in the popular use of the words, we "fancy" and "imagine" what is not the fact. I can here only afford room to refer the reader to Mr. Ruskin's own fine dissertations on the respective functions of true imagination and fancy—one of his definitions of imagination being that it is the faculty of "taking things by the heart," and as such, certainly not a faculty of seeing things falsely. The question is, does the metaphor of Keats express the poetic truth forcibly to kindred imaginative minds, or does it not? If, as is the case with so many fine-sounding metaphorical expressions, this expression when examined should prove inaccurate, far-fetched, affected, disturbing, and degrading, not intensifying and ennobling to the harmonious presentment of that which the poet intended to represent, then is the metaphor false, and because false, therefore bad as art. Yet poetry is groundlessly accused of mixing and confusing incongruous metaphors, by men of cold prosaic temperament, when several vital characteristics of an object are hinted at by more than one metaphor, which is permissible even in the same sentence. But there *is* a vicious, because a cold and insincere mixing of metaphors. Wisdom is justified of

her children. The inspired poets—men like Pindar, Shakespeare, Æschylus, and Shelley—constantly blend their metaphors in the legitimate fashion that justifies itself to kindred spirits by the result attained. But you might multiply vague epithets for ever, and not hit it off—not transfix the core of a thing's individuality—as you can do by a single happy metaphor. There are correspondences between spirit and matter, and it is in seizing these that we find each analogue in spirit and matter becoming suddenly luminous, intelligible, real. It would not, as is assumed, be *more accurate* to say, "the foam falls gradually." These terms are too abstract: other things also fall gradually; and therefore they do not give the individuality of the phenomenon in question. There is, indeed, some error involved in the use of Keats' metaphor; but this error is allowed for, and it is the most accurate expression possible of the fact; for the error of poverty and vagueness which the more abstract epithets would involve is a far more radical error; so that they are erroneously supposed to be more scientific and exact. The commonest terms in use for expressing mental and moral qualities are derived from conditions and qualities of matter—that is, are used metaphorically; and yet we do not call them "fallacies." We talk of an "upright man" in the moral sense as readily as we talk of an upright man in the bodily. Our most graphic and vigorous prose must share the fate of our best poetry if metaphor be simply falsehood. How are you to avoid speaking of a tortuous, crooked policy? The splendid vigour of Mr. Ruskin's own prose-poetry is largely due to his felicitous use of metaphor.

Mr. Ruskin, indeed, remarks justly that Homer "would never have written, never have thought of" such a metaphor as this of Keats'. He will call the waves "over-roofed," "full-charged," "monstrous," "compact-black," "wine-coloured," and so on. These terms are as accurate, as incisive, as terms can be, but they never show the slightest

feeling of anything animated in the ocean. Now, this faculty of seeing and giving the external appearance of a thing precisely is eminently Homeric, and is one without which a man can hardly be a poet at all. The "ideal" on which poetasters pique themselves, means but a feeble, insecure grasp of reality; they do not know that to find the ideal they must first hold fast and see into the common external thing which they deem so despicable. But the fellowship of the external thing with certain spiritual things is an additional though latent quality in it, the perception of which may result from a keen gaze into that external appearance. Does Keats, then, see more than Homer? Mr. Ruskin replies that Homer had a faith in the animation of the sea much stronger than Keats'. But "all this sense of something living in it he separates in his mind into a great abstract image of a sea power. He never says the waves rage or are idle. But he says there is somewhat in, and greater than, the waves, which rages and is idle, and that he calls a god" (vol. iii. p. 174).

We must remark upon this that the early poets of a people have seldom displayed so great a care for the beauties of external Nature in general as their later poets have done. Compare Homer and Theocritus, Chaucer and Tennyson. The earlier poetry will deal chiefly with the outward, active life of man—his wars, hunting, passion for women and other excitements, with all the intrigues and adventures to which this may give rise; and the noblest songs have been sung about these simple universally interesting themes. But the criticism which insists on the poetry of a later age being squared on the model of that of an earlier may surely be reminded that the earlier poetry is so great and good precisely because it is spontaneous, the perfect expression of the age in which it was produced. As men come to lead more artificial, quiet lives, they reflect more on themselves and on the nature around them, they stand in new relationships to external things,

they acquire new habits of feeling, acting, thinking, and external Nature becomes the mirror of their own more highly organized existence ; so that the earlier poet cannot see those subtle meanings in the face of Nature which the later poet sees. If the external features of Nature remain the same, the spirit of men in relation with them changes ever. Even the senses, or some of them, become more subtle, as Mr. Gladstone has shown in his essay on the colour-sense of Homer and the Greeks. But if we admitted, with Mr. Ruskin, that Homer was as sensitively alive to the delicate play of expression on the mobile countenance of Nature as Keats was, only that he ascribed it to some god, and that Keats did not, we should be constrained to ask, does Mr. Ruskin mean that Homer's was a more correct mode of embodying that animation than was the metaphorical mode of Keats? Are we to believe in the Pagan nature-divinities? I am not denying it. But if not, and if yet Mr. Ruskin admits the animation in question, it is hard to see why he praises Homer, and deems the metaphor of Keats a pleasant falsehood, a characteristic of the vicious modern manner. Surely we owe the restoration of our faith in the glorious animation of Nature very largely to Mr. Ruskin's own teaching, which makes his inconsistent doctrine on this subject of metaphor the more to be regretted. What renders the language of our poets often incorrect, confused, affected, is that while they cannot help feeling that there is a life and a spirit in Nature, they are instructed by our teachers of authority that this feeling is but a pretty superstition, allowable, indeed, in poetry, yet not to be mistaken for a true belief. Poetry, therefore, becomes an "elegant pastime," by no means the expression of our deepest and most earnest insight. The result last century was that in our poetry "mountains nodded drowsy heads," and "flowers sweated beneath the night dew." For if images of this kind be delusions, with no basis in truth, the elegance of them resolves itself into a mere matter of taste. And

people at that time (drinking cockneys especially) thought those ideas very lovely and poetic indeed. Even now, many of our most intelligent minds believe that, as Clough sings,

“ Earth goes by chemic forces, Heaven’s
A mécanique celeste,
And heart and mind of human kind
A watchwork as the rest.”

Others of us believe that there is a deity indeed, but one who, having made all this, only watches it go, and occasionally interferes with the order of it to prove to us that it did not make itself, and to remind us of his own existence. But of the God of St. Paul, “in whom we (and all other things) live, move, and have our being,” we hear very little. If, however, it were permitted in so enlightened an age as the present to broach so old-world an idea, we might yet believe with Homer that there is a great Sea-power, a Divinity in the sea, as well as a deal of salt-water; then we might still believe with the great modern poet, with whom it was no pretty lie, but a profound faith, that—

“ There is a spirit in the pathless woods,
A presence that disturbs us with the joy
Of elevated thoughts, a sense sublime
Of something far more deeply interfused,
Whose dwelling is the light of setting suns,
And the round ocean, and the living air,
And the blue sky, and in the mind of man,
A motion and a spirit that impels
All thinking things, all objects of all thought,
And rolls through all things.”

I think it especially important to examine the position which Mr. Ruskin has taken up on this question in his third volume of “*Modern Painters*,” because it tends to neutralize the noble teaching of the second, to which our art owes incalculable benefit. We have only to turn to the chapter on “*Imagination Penetrative*” (vol. ii. p. 163) to be assured of the inconsistency of his doctrine on this subject. As an

instance of what he means by Imagination Penetrative, he quotes from Milton—

“Bring the rathe primrose that forsaken dies,
With cowslips wan that hang the pensive head,
And every flower that sad embroidery wears.”

How can a primrose be *forsaken*, or cowslips hang *pensive* heads? According to the chapter on “Pathetic Fallacy,” only a poet of the secondary order would indulge in such pretty fallacies, illusions; though I must confess that these particular images hardly seem to me quite in harmony with spring, or with the gladsome cowslip. He goes on, however, to quote Shakespeare’s image of “pale primroses dying unmarried, before they can behold bright Phœbus in his strength;” yet what is his comment here? “Observe how the imagination goes into the very inmost soul of every flower,” and “never stops on their spots or bodily shape,” which last remark implies a half-censure of Milton for describing “the pansy freaked with jet,” which being merely a touch of inferior fancy, mingles with, and mars the work of imagination. Again, “the imagination sees the heart and inner nature, and makes them felt, but is often obscure, mysterious, and interrupted in its giving of outer detail.” Even in the case of elaborate imaginative structures, such as those of Dante and Milton, the poet’s work, I would contend, is the product of sheer insight, whose keen, long, ardent gaze into the eyes of Nature, human and material, has drawn the very soul out of her. From that central point to which the seer has pierced, all parts are seen in their own relative proportion, harmony, hidden meaning, and purpose; while the several parts that are chosen and united in his work form a perfect organic whole, because married, not according to the accidental juxtaposition in which the vulgar eye may chance to behold them at the surface, but according to the eternal affinities they have in nature for one another. The parts of such a work are not pieced arbitrarily together; they have vital

unison ; and they grow up into a grand symphony in the creative mind of the poet, which process is just a reproduction in small of the vast organic evolution of the universe. Men see things in isolated, broken pieces ; but the poet, like the comparative anatomist, brings together the fragments that indeed belong to one another, and so forms for us living models of the universal kosmos. In this manner, true artists have positively created new individualities—or at least gone to the verge of creating them. If the idea of an imaginary living creature were perfectly sufficient and self-consistent, it would actually live. Meanwhile, great imaginations approach such a goal. There is the Dragon of Turner in the Jason of his *Liber Studiorum* ; the terrible Lombard Griffin, so intensely portrayed by Ruskin ; the Satan of Milton ; the Caliban of Shakespeare ; the Mephistopheles of Goethe ; the Quasimodo of Hugo. These may have actually breathed, or may actually breathe some day, they seem so real, so possible. This doctrine that all true poetry tells the most fundamental truth about things, instead of being merely a play of pretty or pathetic fallacies, an elegant relaxation for after dinner, as modern critics seem to conceive, I venture to propound as having the sanction of no mean critic—Aristotle. For Aristotle, while defining poetry “viewed generally” as *μιμήσις*, yet explains that he does not mean such imitation as modern photography might make. “Poetry,” he explains, “represents actions less ordinary and interchanged, and endows them with more rareness,” than is found in Nature. The poet’s business is “not to tell events as they have actually happened, but as they might possibly happen.” “Poetry is more sublime and more philosophical than history.” I contend, then, for Aristotle’s definition of poetry as *μιμήσις*, the imitative or, as one might prefer to paraphrase it, the reproductive art, as on the whole best and most helpful. And I have merely wished here in passing to strengthen my argu-

ment by showing that the principles I apply to defend the use of metaphor are of universal application in all departments of poetry. Thus I might proceed to point out that there is more essential truth in the few lines embodying Spenser's symbolic impersonations of the vices (envy, gluttony, jealousy, etc.), than could be expressed in as many pages of abstract dissertation.

It is unfortunate that Wordsworth, in the course of those few discussions of his on the principles of Poetry, which are worth their weight in gold (considering how little scientific standard criticism our language can boast, in comparison with the portentous amount of smart, conceited, futile Babel-utterances, with which the weekly and daily press teems to our bewilderment and confusion)—it is unfortunate that Wordsworth himself should have used some unguarded language, relative to the question we are here discussing. He says that imagination "confers additional properties on an object, or abstracts from it some of those which it actually possesses." (Preface to Edition of 1815, of Poetical Works.) He gives several instances of this, which it may be well for us to examine. First, from Milton—

"As when far off at sea a fleet descried
Hangs in the clouds."

No fleet hangs in the clouds. But the poet, professing to describe the appearance of a fleet far out at sea, describes it exactly by these terms, and adds nothing to the picture that does not belong to the actual appearance. Wordsworth next quotes from his own perfect descriptive poetry, "Over his own sweet voice the stock-dove broods." The word "broods," Wordsworth himself remarks, conveys the manner in which the bird reiterates and prolongs the soft note, as if participating in a still and quiet satisfaction, like that which may be supposed inseparable from the continuous process of incubation. Now it is probably true, scientifically as well as poetically, that the bird delights in,

and broods over its own note, while his mate is sitting near upon their eggs. Again—

“O cuckoo, shall I call thee bird,
Or but a wandering voice?”

If the poet, looking up at the grey cuckoo in the tree, were to address it as a voice rather than a bird, the thought would not be pleasing, but absurd, because untrue and affected. But we may conceive him wandering meditatively about Rydal, as was his wont, lying upon the fresh green grass, and listening to that beloved voice of the spring, with all its old, sweet, sad associations. Has not that cuckoo-voice become part of ourselves, a link of our hearts to some long and lovely past? Has not that quiet, happy voice, falling into the hearts of lovers, beating very close to one another, thrilled them into yet dearer union? And when such lovers have been parted, has not this gentle voice united them in spirit again as they listened? Is not the cuckoo voice indeed all this, the very spirit of our English spring, the voice of our childhood, as of the well-beloved sister, or child, or mother, who used to hear it with us, and is no more—all this quite as much, nay, how very much more, than the love-call of one individual cuckoo? The poet has told us one truth, and the naturalist may tell us another. The one “lies” and “alters Nature” quite as little as the other. Wordsworth’s genius steals like moonlight, silent and unaware, into many a hidden nook that seemed barren and formless before, but now teems with shy and rare loveliness, as of herb and flower; yet the moonlight only reveals what is already there. Creative, indeed, are these isolated images and metaphors, having a vital truth and coherence of their own, quite as real as that of the vaster completed works of mighty art; and while in the highest work these inferior features will have their meaning in strict subordination to the whole, yet criticism is wrong to ignore and decry beauty of detail, which, if genuine, is itself the offspring of the same quickening, creative spark, fusing

diverse elements into one. Though Keats was no weakling of the Kirke White stamp, to be "snuffed out by an article," one pain more might have been spared him on his consumptive deathbed, could his critic have been less malignant, and intelligent enough to comprehend that if unity of plan were all in all, and the character of the details of no importance, then a symmetrical periwig, or a sensation story, or a smart review, would be nobler than "Endymion,"—which is absurd.

Again, take more particularly that instance from Kingsley of what Mr. Ruskin calls "pathetic fallacy." Of Mary, who was drowned in calling the cattle home across the sands of Dee, he sings—

"They rowed her in across the rolling foam,
The cruel crawling foam."

Now, how can foam be cruel? Mr. Ruskin admits there is a dramatic propriety in the expression; I mean, that the feeling with which a spectator would regard the foam in these circumstances is correctly expressed; but he contends that the reason in this condition is unhinged by grief: foam is not cruel, whether we fancy it so or not. He admits that a person feeling it so will probably be higher in nature than one who should feel nothing of the kind, but contends that there is a third order of natures, higher than either—natures which control such fallacious feelings by the force of their intellects. Such men know and feel too much of the past and future, and all things beside and around that which immediately affects them, to be shaken by it. Thus the high creative poet might be thought impassive (shallow people think Dante stern) because he has a great centre of reflection and knowledge in which he stands serene, and watches the feeling, as it were, from far off. I must admit that there is much truth in this fine criticism; but must remark that it is one thing to be washed away from our anchorage of reason—which, how-

ever, as Mr. Ruskin admits, there are circumstances wherein we should not think it a proof of men's nobleness not to be—and another to be tossed up and down on the strong billows of feeling, holding yet fast to the anchor of reason. I mean that the influence of feeling on our intellects need not necessarily be a distorting influence; feeling may teach us what we could not learn without it. Love, *e.g.*, may often blind us to the defects of a beloved person, and so far confuse our judgment; yet since love puts us *en rapport*, in sympathy with that person, it imparts insight, giving wider and more essential data for the exercise of the understanding. The man to whom a primrose is “a yellow primrose and nothing more,” by no means knows it correctly, because he does not feel any love for it or interest in it. He knows nothing at all about it except the name. A “dispassionate” judgment means too often a blind, indiscriminating judgment formed by men who want those fine inner organs of sensibility, without which the data for a true judgment are necessarily wanting; and the stupid judgment of a cynic is infinitely more mischievous than that of a warm partizan, because it has the credit of exceptional “impartiality,” and freedom from “prejudice.”

Let us examine this special instance of pathetic fallacy from Kingsley. What and whence is this impression of cruelty in the foam? Is it not the appropriate expression of a sense that comes over us in such-like terrible circumstances that there is on the outside of our weak wills and impotent understandings some mysterious Destiny manifesting itself, especially in that fixed and iron-bound order of Nature so implacable toward men if, in often innocent ignorance, they happen to be caught into the blind whirl of its relentless machinery? For then it whirls on and crushes, not the living flesh and blood only itself has wrought so cunningly, but too often, alas! as it seems, very human reason—the tenderest and holiest of human sensibilities. In the coolest

blood regarding such a spectacle, I ask how shall we express the fact of it? The ancients had their cruel gods and their blind fate. Our faith, on the other hand, if faith we have at all, is in a Supreme Being, whose nature we can best conceive by naming Him Love. And yet he who does not feel the weary burden and the mystery of all this unintelligible world—he who does not confess what a feeble glimmer is all our boasted light—that he is an infant crying in the dark, and with no language but a cry—he has not had the data upon which to form a real philosophy. What, then, is it worth? As men, as wise men, we must feel these terrible realities in the core of our beings. If we still retain our faith, after this, well and good. But how shall we express the bewildered anguish of the spirit in such seasons of calamity? To me it seems as inevitable, and therefore as proper as it is natural, that we should upbraid the instrument—the second cause—the cruel, crawling sea-foam, that swallowed up the innocent we loved. Let the philosopher at least furnish us with correcter formulæ for the expression of the feeling due from us as human beings on such an occasion as this. Behind those engulfing seas is there not, indeed, some pitiless, murderous power, some prince, or princes of a world that lieth in the wicked, however that power may be overruled by a supreme Maternal Love?

Mr. Ruskin again quotes a very affecting ballad from Casimir de la Vigne, as an instance of what he thinks the highest manner, where the poet refuses to let himself be carried away by the horror of the incident he relates, and simply pictures the dreadful, naked, physical fact of it without any comment, impressing us far more than if he had indulged in any pathetic fancies of his own about it. There is to be a ball at the French ambassador's, and a fair young girl is dressing for it. All the little nothings she babbles to her maid while beautifying herself—she is to meet her lover—are told just as she would say them,

when a spark catches her dress, and she is burnt to death.
What is the result? The poet only tell us—

“On disait, pauvre Constance !
Et on dansait jusqu’au jour
Chez l’ambassadeur de France.”

Now I do not believe with Mr. Ruskin that dark fallacious thoughts occurred to the poet here, and that he resolutely put them by because he philosophically held them to be false. I do not believe that the highest poet is “unparticipating in the passions” he depicts, as Coleridge affirms of Shakespeare; he is by turns in the situations of the characters he represents; and here the emotion is so genuine, that the poet’s philosophy would have been torn to tatters by it, for indeed such a philosophy would only have waited the rending of reality.

But in cases of sudden, intense emotion, metaphor, which implies some degree of reflection on the circumstance, is for the most part out of place. Thought is overwhelmed by feeling—the bare, fearful fact, that alone we see and know, we can but relate that. We are dazed, crushed, annihilated by the shock of a great fall, of a great woe. But Time, the healer, comes, and though we may not thank him, now the anguish tinges every experience, every movement, later it seems a pregnant necessity, and yet some relief, to remember, to reflect, to utter forth our sorrow. The poet here feels and relates just as a witness fresh from the incident would do. This bare relation is the most appropriate to the incident related. But when meditation upon an afflicting circumstance is possible and natural, then metaphor and brief comment may be most appropriate to the fullest impression derivable from the circumstance. Wordsworth, therefore, comments a good deal on what he relates (sometimes unduly, but usually with effect), because he does not love violent passion, rapid action, stirring, overwhelming situations. And yet it is true that the most exalted and maddened feeling does sometimes burst forth

into wild and tremendous hyperbole—which justifies Shakespeare, but I think only in a measure ; surely this is apt to be overdone, and exaggerated by the Elizabethans, as even by our greatest poet. Partly, however, the dramatic poet gives his own interpretation in words of what the person may only vaguely feel—but is it an appropriate one?—that is the question.

One more striking instance where what seems to be merely fallacy may be argued to be philosophically true—though to the poet himself the revelation was made rather through feeling and imagination than through reasoning—we may take from Keats. Instead of treating our true poets as amusing liars, I would often rather go to them for solid intellectual food than to the professed dealers in that article. In the “Endymion,” Keats says—

“For I have ever thought that (love) might bless
The world with benefits unknowingly.”

And again—

“Who of men can tell
That flowers would bloom, or that green fruit would swell
To melting pulp, that fish would have bright mail,
The earth its dower of river, wood, and vale,
The meadows runnels, runnels pebble-stones,
The seed its harvest, or the lute its tones,
Tones ravishment, or ravishment its sweet,
If human souls did never kiss and greet?”

Now I will only briefly indicate the principle that it is our human love, our power of loving, that gives these beautiful things a being as we know them ; for their being, though partly external to us, is also partly engendered by contact with human minds and hearts. Are not the forces which seem to constitute material things, with all their strength, healthfulness, and beauty, forces cognate to Love, which is the affinity and attraction of diverse spirits for one another? Physical attraction, which implies also difference and repulsion, is love in its lowest stage of development. And what is the order, the law, according to which

the highest human love is developed? We pass upward from cohesion to chemical affinities, but it is in the first faint fringes of the organic world that love dawns in her own proper form. There are sexes in plants, and often the pistil of one flower needs to be fertilized by the pollen from another before it can become productive; in animals, the lower love is literally present, till in man it becomes transfigured into its own proper spiritual and heavenly being; and without this for an end and aim, where would cohesion and all the lower forces be? The poet says this in a different way. Looking at things as they are in life, in the concrete, his quick sympathetic insight has discerned this essential truth. Philosophical analysis may reach it in another manner. When, therefore, we attribute to Nature a sympathy with our moods, whether of joy or sorrow, we are not under an amiable delusion; the intuition is true, although the shape it assumes may not always be scientifically correct. Nature, like man, has her bright, rich, joyous, and her desolate, decaying phases; in joy we feel the former most, in sorrow we feel and discern more especially the latter. We may indulge these feelings to a morbid degree, and see things too brightly or too gloomily; but the sense of a sympathy in Nature has its basis in fact.

In concluding, I must touch for a moment on Mr. Ruskin's assertion that metaphor and pathetic fallacy are characteristic rather of the secondary than of the primary order of poets—an assertion which I do not think the facts of the case will bear out. I have already given a reason for the rarity of such forms of thought in very early poetry; but for their rarity in classical poetry another reason may be given. In Oriental poetry they are very usual, because such modes of conceiving are much more appropriate to the Oriental genius. Look at the profound and mystic symbolism of Egyptian, Persian, Phœnician, or Indian mythology; to those races the material ever appeared as a film floating upon the deeps of spirit—a film not merely

transparent, but itself very spirit, only cooled as it were, solidified, and become gross. The bold hyperbole of Hebrew, Arabic, Persian love and war poetry is essential to the genius of the Oriental nature. But in the classical temper there is little sense of the infinite, vague, mysterious: the different subject-matters on which intelligence can be exercised are viewed apart, not in their occult relationships: all delight is in the sunny actual life, in that which is pleasant, symmetrical, clear, definite. What palpable, complete, satisfying symmetry! what bright beauty of material and structure in those consummate temples, fragments though they be, on and about the Acropolis at Athens! How full is the sunlight blaze upon their golden peristyles, under the blue sky, overlooking the blue sea! how black and sharp-cut the shadows beside them! There is sorrow or fate with the Greeks, as with others; but it stands by itself, quite apart from joy. In a Gothic cathedral all is dusk, sublime, mysterious, teeming with vague symbol—at once secretion and food of the imagination. Light and shadow are married and mingled; the light is dim and religious; derives a spiritual glory from its very fellowship with darkness; counterfeits a gloom; while the dark becomes half luminous and opalescent from its fellowship with light. “Our sweetest songs,” the modern poet sings, “are those that tell of saddest thought.” And yet, with respect to Homer, does not even Homer take the heart-broken old man, when he leaves the tent of Agamemnon empty-handed, back by the shore of the *πολυφλοίσβοιο θαλάσσης*? Has this magnificent epithet for the sea no reference to the lonely, stormful, sorrowful spirit of the old man as he walked by the long, lone surges of it? This surely is not a purely physically-descriptive epithet, like *οἴνοπα πόντον*. But go on to Æschylus, and what will Mr. Ruskin say to his *ἀνήριθμον γέλασμα*, the innumerable smile or laughter of the sea? In Theocritus, again, assuredly metaphor and pathetic fallacy may be found (notably in

the first idyl). The pathetic fallacy in Shakespeare's exquisite poem, "Venus and Adonis," "No grass, herb, leaf, or weed but stole his blood and seemed with him to bleed; this solemn sympathy poor Venus noteth," etc., is adapted directly from the Sicilian poet Bion's "Lament for Adonis." Again, that beautiful lament of Moschus—the "Epitaph of Bion"—(third idyl) abounds in similar pathetic fallacy. Are not Virgil and Catullus (no mean poets, surely) rich in graphic and appropriate poetic metaphors? Mr. Tennyson's "dividing the swift mind in act to throw," in "Morte d'Arthur," is of course from Virgil. Let us pass to Christian poetry. I have shown that we shall be more likely to find these types of idea in modern than in classical poetry, and that by no means because modern taste is more vicious, but because the very conditions of life and thought are changed. In the early mediæval poets, indeed, we have more allegory, and elaborate symbolism than metaphor and pathetic fallacy. But science, and popular theology alike setting themselves in opposition to poetic insight and aspiration, our poets, striving to link the two spheres of the universe together, do it in a confused, halting manner, like children stealing a forbidden pleasure, when the eye of the governing intellect is for a moment turned away. Yet the stupendous poem of Dante forms, we may say, one grand sustained metaphor. And realistic Chaucer too, has he not written "The House of Fame," "The Flower and the Leaf," "The Romaunt of the Rose?" But Petrarch, and Lorenzo de Medici are full of metaphor and pathetic fallacy proper, as, had I space, I might prove. Coming on to Shakespeare, in him these tendencies of thought and feeling already assume their modern expression. Confining myself to his sonnets and poems, I open them almost at random; and in "The Rape of Lucrece" I find "a voice dammed up with woe;" "sorrow ebbs, being blown with wind of words." In the description of the hare-hunt in "Venus and Adonis,"—as incisive, as

clear-cut in its workmanship as any gem intaglio,—the phrase occurs, “Each *envious* briar.” In the sonnets we have “The earth doth weep the sun being set.” Endless instances might be quoted from Ben Jonson, Fletcher, Drayton, Drummond, and the lesser Elizabethans. But in some of these, legitimate outgrowth of metaphor degenerates into parasitic conceit, as it did too often in our own so-called “spasmodic” poets; and yet in neither case did our literature touch the base and frigid affectations of such writers as are lashed in the “Dunciad” of Pope. It seems, however, as if our criticism had of late too much confounded legitimate and genuine metaphor, illustrative of the poet’s main design, with mere arbitrary quirks of a nimble, ingenious fancy. But we have only to compare two poems, alike sensuous and rich in imagery, to feel the difference—the “Venus and Adonis” of Shakespeare, and the “Hero and Leander” of Marlowe, beautiful as Marlowe’s portion of that may be.

CHATTERTON.

IT is to be hoped that, since the publication of the Rev. Walter Skeat's edition, people may now *read* Chatterton; for he has long been to the majority a mere name. The Rowley poems ought to be read, and they are now very easy reading. Mr. Skeat has preserved their peculiar flavour by retaining enough of their antique phraseology, but where rhythm and rhyme are not involved he has often modernized it, while the Rowleian words are translated at the bottom of the page. I advisedly adopt Mr. Skeat's phrase, "Rowleian," because he has made it, in his preliminary essay, if possible more certain than before that the poems are not written in fifteenth-century English; that they are not by the pseudo-monk Rowley, but by "the marvellous boy" himself. Mr. Skeat makes one very important remark. It is a most significant fact that Chatterton's words in the foot-notes frequently suit the scansion of the line better than his words in the Rowley text, and this made the re-writing of the poems more easy. But why is the fact so? Because they were first written in modern English.

That a boy of fifteen or sixteen should have produced such poems is certainly startling, but that any one should have produced the works of Shakespeare is also startling. This is a question of what genius can or cannot do; but that these poems should have been written in the fifteenth century involves many more inconceivable difficulties, of a different kind altogether. In fact, the only

plausible argument on this side was the alleged inferiority of Chatterton's acknowledged poems. But this—partly from a certain glamour cast over the Rowley series by their supposed origin and archaic form, and partly from a spirit of partizanship introduced into the controversy—has been very greatly exaggerated. They are not so good as the others, taken as a whole; but if they had stood alone, they would have proved the child who wrote them—who poured them forth in profusion, partly under the pressure of want—to be a unique literary phenomenon. We have lines like these,—on a good organist :—

“He keeps the passions with the sound in play,
And the soul trembles with the trembling key.”

Again :—

“Conscience, the soul-chameleon's varying hue,
Reflects all notions, to no notion true.”

But what strikes one most of all through these acknowledged poems is the boy's almost ghastly precocity, though there is also doubtless a good deal of swagger and hobbledoyish assumption of worldly wisdom and immoral knowledge. Professor Masson, in his brief but beautiful memoir (which we always associate with that other little gem of poetical biography, Lord Houghton's “Life of Keats”), well describes the impetuous young fellow, who had just come off the Bristol coach, leaving his luggage at Mrs. Ballance's in Shoreditch (where he first lodged), and setting off instantly, though it was between five and six on a cold, dusk April evening, to call on no less than four publishers, who lived a long way off and in different directions; seeing them all, moreover, and “going through each interview without any unnecessary degree of bashfulness.” The “Revenge,” his little burletta which was written for Marylebone Gardens, and probably performed there after his death, is perfectly charming for gaiety and sprightliness; and the satirical humour of two pieces where he ridicules the affected dilettante of Strawberry Hill is of the highest

promise ("The Woman of Spirit" and "Memoirs of a Sad Dog").

It has been well observed that Chatterton lived two distinct lives, and produced literary work accordingly. He had two distinct moods: in the graver, more imaginative mood most of the Rowley series, prose and verse, are written; nevertheless, there are humour and sprightliness in them too, which have not been sufficiently remarked. How excellent the humour of "The De Bergham Pedigree," with which he hoaxed Bergum, the pewterer, whose arms were supposed to include "two cat-a-mountains ermine," etc. ! Yet the pewterer, like Oliver Twist, positively "asked for more," and straightway Chatterton brought it. But what I wish to make clear is that in the finer serious passages of the modern series, the same manner is distinctly discernible as in corresponding passages of the ancient; there is notably the strong Spenserian tendency to *personification*. Thus we have—

"Self-frighted Fear creeps silent through the gloom,
Starts at the rustling leaf and rolls his eyes ;"

and—

"Pale rugged Winter, bending o'er his tread,
His grizzled hair bedropt with icy dew,
His eyes a dusky light congealed and dead,
His robe a tinge of bright ethereal blue,—

"His train a motleyed, sanguine, sable cloud,
He limps along the russet dreary moor,
Whilst rising whirlwinds, blasting keen, and loud
Roll the white surges to the sounding shore."

How do the s's hiss in the last couplet, as the sense demands! How large and open the vowel-sounds!

The elegy on the death of his great friend, Phillips, is full of these personifications. Very beautiful are the following lines!—

"The darksome ruins of some sacred cell,
Where erst the sons of Superstition trod,
Tottering upon the mossy meadow, tell
We better know, but less adore our God.

“ Now as I mournful tread the gloomy nave,
Through the wide window, once with mysteries dight,
The distant forest, and the darkened wave
Of the swoln Avon ravishes my sight.”

Again, the noble “Elegy at Stanton Drew,” in which there is a stately majesty of thought, imagery, and language, if it had been translated into the Rowley dialect, would have been hailed as among the best of that series, and seems even now to be out of place among the juvenile, alloyed, and insincere verses which (finding they paid better) the boy wrote, chiefly at the later period, when he had lost his faith in God and man, and had felt more of the muddy passions, venal aspirations, and dreary disappointments of life. Alas! how young was he for such experience; but, noteworthy fact, in this elegy he touches upon that ancient world which he loved. He is in a ruin, and he beholds the Druid beside the altar. The “African Eclogues” also contain beautiful poetry.

As to the Rowley series, I do not hesitate to say that they contain some of the finest poetry in our language, though they are unequal, just as the modern poems are. They are jewels set in the prose-romance of ancient Bristol as imagined by Chatterton; though Canynge, the old mayor, who is the central figure, was an actual person of importance. Let us for a moment glance at the earlier history of the boy-poet who conceived all this. For, splendid as his poetry often is, there is no doubt that it derives much of its interest for us from our knowledge of the marvellous child who wrote it. There is a personal fascination about this prodigy of genius, and his strange, grim, half-humorous, half-awful history. Even some full-grown writers will always be associated with their writings in our imagination; their magic influence seems to flash as much out of their lives as out of their works; such a one was Dante; such another Johnson; such another Byron; but of the child Chatterton it is, of course, more

eminently true. Until he was six years old he was supposed to be *deficient* in intellect, for he would sit alone for hours, crying and moody. The utter inability of those at home, and even of his acquaintances at Bristol, to appreciate him, deepened his natural reserve, as Professor Wilson observes, into habitual secretiveness; and that love of mystery and mystifying which he displayed is to some degree thus accounted for. As to his literary patrons at Bristol, the Catcotts and Barretts, etc., they were such a curious compound of literary or bibliomaniacal taste, consummate vanity, and portentous duncehood, that one can feel, if one gets to know the boy at all, what a rare, grim, lonely bit of fun it must have been to mystify them. Suddenly, however, the illuminated capitals of an old musical folio of his father's, which his mother was tearing up, attracted the child, and he straightway fell in love with them; henceforth he began to learn, and she taught him to read out of an old black-letter Bible, "so that he only turned in later years from mediæval illumination and antique typography, to the unfamiliar aspect of contemporary literature." The corner rounded, he devoured knowledge with insatiable voracity, studying all day and all night up till quite early in the morning, as his bedfellow in Shoreditch told Croft. Then he shut himself up in an attic with a great piece of ochre, pounce-bags full of charcoal-dust, and parchments (which he mostly used for copying old heraldic devices, and other architectural antique drawings).

He was the descendant of a long line of sextons, who had in former times paced along the old aisles of St. Mary Redcliffe, jangling its ponderous keys, and talking with stony effigies of knights and saints buried below; his father was a wild, clever, drunken sub-chaunter, who died before Thomas was born. The child, therefore, living close to the church as he did (both at his mother's, and Colston's School—the Bristol Bluecoat School, to which he went at seven years old), would have constant access to it; and as a

matter of fact, it was the master-spell that dominated his passionate imagination ; it was the nucleus of the whole Rowley romance. There was one spot in Redcliffe meadows, in full view of the church, where a companion tells us he delighted to lie ; and after fixing his eyes on the church in a kind of trance, he would at last break out with "that steeple was struck by lightning ; that was the place where they formerly acted plays." The poems are full of allusions to the church :—

"Thou seest this maestrie of a human hand,
The pride of Bristowe and the Western land."

And to any one who has seen the church, its weird effect upon this wonderful child who loved to haunt it will not appear surprising. It is one of the most glorious old churches in Europe ; the airy, solemn harmony of its nave, aisles, pierced arches, groined roof, stained windows, and monumental effigies of old worthies lying upon their tombs is certainly unsurpassed. It is specially interesting now, since unhappy genius has breathed life into these stone figures and bidden them arise. Chatterton, in one of his poems, says, if you prayed long enough, surely a crusader or other worthy in the attitude of prayer would move, and repeat the Ave Mary. I knew a child to whom an imaginary history of his own creation was for many years quite as real as the actual events of his life. So it was with Chatterton. Only with him these conceptions formed a whole of transcendent poetic beauty. To acknowledge to himself and others that the monk Rowley did *not* write the poems would have broken the spell that entranced him in his magical, beautiful world. As to the manufacture of parchments, he never produced more than one or two, when very much pressed by the dunderheads, who would not believe him, even when he *confessed* to writing some of the poems. Over the north porch of St. Mary's there is a room called the muniment-room, in which the celebrated old chests, full of parchments and deeds

relating to the church, were placed ; they had been ransacked, and all that was valuable removed before the poet's birth, his father having appropriated much of what remained as mere waste-paper. Some of the mouldering chests are still there ; and the spot appears to the present writer a sacred one, well worthy of a pilgrimage. Through the mullions you see the old tower, with its beautiful tracery ; birds cawing about it ; the sunshine streaming out of the blue sky, over antique chests, and dim, dusty floor ; if you pause, reverent and silent, the boy Chatterton himself seems to muse once more there beside you.

Chatterton's mother's house was full of the old parchments, and certainly some of these may have been actually engrossed by old dead lawyers who lived in the time of the Wars of the Roses. That Chatterton even got some of his names out of them seems to me probable, perhaps the very name of Rowley ; did he get any information, any history ? Possibly. It was in this mediæval world of his imagination, at any rate, that he breathed most freely—all that was noblest, most reverent, most tender, and most beauty-loving in his soul assumed as by instinct the garb of a long-past age ; like this dim and venerable church, it was aloof from the vulgarity, meanness, triviality, and grossness of his contemporary life. Johnson stood in that muniment-room, a little while after the suicide, with Bozzy, and with that pewterer, who sold the Rowley poems which he had got from Chatterton, partly by free gift, partly by paltry doles of pocket-money, for £50 ; the man who, though the poet's mother was in great indigence, put her off with the sum of five guineas. The account of the coroner's inquest furnished by Mr. Gutch seems of doubtful authenticity, though Masson accepts it ; but it is a curiously poetical invention, if it be not the truth. When he came into Mrs. Angell's, in Brooke Street, on the last evening of his weary wanderings in London, after buying the arsenic from Cross and walking about all day with his hands in his pocket, no one knows

where, he would not eat, but sat moping by the fire with his chin on his knees, muttering rhymes in some old unknown language. He then kissed Mrs. Angell—he had never done so before—and went upstairs to his garret, stamping on every stair as he went slowly up, as though he would break it, locking the door of his room behind him. If this account be true, the proof that his reason had failed seems complete ; but even then, here he was turning back at the last moment to the old home of his imagination, to a bygone England peopled with figures of noble stature, and St. Mary Redcliffe in the midst. At any rate, it is noteworthy that here in Brooke Street about a month before his death, he wrote one of the finest of the Rowley poems, "The Ballad of Charity."* It is overshadowed with his own deepening doom ; but it is in his highest region of pure, tender, stately solemnity, abounding with the most graphic touches of natural description he ever penned. It seems to me perhaps his most *uniformly* excellent poetical work, and speaks volumes for the stupendous height to which his genius might have attained, seeing that it showed no signs of declining, but rather maturing mastery, even at the last, notwithstanding all the disadvantages, moral, intellectual, and physical, which threatened and assailed it. But the editor of the magazine to whom he sent this Rowley poem would not take it ; slipshod scurrilities or ephemeral stories were more to the taste of himself and his readers. A notice appeared in the magazine after Chatterton had given up the battle of life in disgust, addressed to him (its anonymous contributor) to the effect that the poem "might have been improved." And to think of the vapid, stilted stuff that was thought fine poetry then !

* This essay was written in 1872. But only the other day I read Mr. Theodore Watts's subtle and suggestive preface to Chatterton in Ward's "British Poets," and must advert, with entire agreement, to his contention that Chatterton may be named father of the romantic movement in England, both in point of matter and manner. He points out the remarkable combinations of iambic and anapest in the "Ballad of Charity," a metre adopted subsequently by Coleridge in "Christabel," and stolen from him by Scott.

In looking back along the line of our very foremost poets after Milton, we see Pope arise, and after Pope who but the boy Chatterton deserves the laurel-wreath of highest poet, until Burns has risen above the horizon? But after him we have a galaxy of no less than seven between whom the kingdom has to be divided—Shelley, Byron, Coleridge, Wordsworth, Keats, Scott, Landor—even if we put Crabbe, Campbell, Moore, and Hood into the secondary rank.* In fact, Goldsmith, Collins, Thomson, Gray, and Cowper were the only considerable contemporary poets; and Chatterton at sixteen was more than their equal, promising very unmistakably to rise much higher still. “Ælla” is a drama worthy of the Elizabethans; there is, of course, no intricate knowledge of human nature, such as only a longer experience could have given; nevertheless, there is a great dramatic faculty unmistakably announced; the plot is good, the movement is unembarrassed, and carries you along. The character of Bertha is slightly, but tenderly and distinctly drawn; those of Ælla and Celmonde are vigorously conceived and discriminated, while the working out is specifically *poetic*. The often-quoted song, “Oh! sing unto my roundelay,” though very touching, is too obviously borrowed from Ophelia’s lovely ditty; but there are two other airy, sprightly songs sung by “the minstrels.” A girl says to her lover—

“Once I heard my grandame say
Youthful damsels should not be
In the pleasant month of May
With young men by the greenwood tree.”

“Goddwyn,” which is a mere fragment, is a splendid torso, for it contains “The Ode to Freedom.” But fancy a sonorous Pindaric ode in the reign of Henry VI.! Elsewhere Rowley writes in blank verse, anticipating Lord Surrey. There is a passage in Byron’s “Childe Harold” that has been much admired, a personification of war; but this

* I am not blind, however, to the merit of Parnell, Young, Shenstone, Dyer, and Falconer.

ode appears to me the original of it, and at any rate is finer. Again, in this fragment a most Shakespearian dramatic genius appears to be rising. King Edward the Confessor, Harold, and Goddwyn are touched in by the hand of one who had read history to some purpose, having a dramatic imagination of his own. In the "Battle of Hastings" we find many passages of the highest merit for distinctness of vision, and nervous appropriateness of language; they are resonant with the din of battle. There is often a direct Homeric force that startles one as with a blow, and withal a sublime heroic atmosphere tempers the long, and sometimes tedious series of physical encounters described. There is a brief, but graphic description of Stonehenge. (Chatterton was hardly ever over-luxuriant—in that too very mature.) We find true poetry in the third eclogue, and in "The Parliament of Sprytes," where we hear the ghosts of former "Bristowans" longing to be alive that they may better see St. Mary's, which, however, they gaze upon on misty moonlight nights, and describe as it is at service-time, together with the dresses of canons and singers, "in crimson chapeaux and scarfs of woaden blue." But one of Chatterton's masterpieces is the "Song to Ælla, Lord of the Castle of Bristol." There seems to me a something indefinite, but very grand about it; the poet addresses the spirit of Ælla in stately and sonorous language—

"Drawn by thy weapon fell,
Down to the depth of hell
Thousands of Dacians went. . . .
O thou! where'er—thy bones at rest—
Thy sprite to haunt delighteth best,—
Whether upon the blood-embued plain,
Or where thou kenst from far
The dismal cry of war;
Or seest some mountain made of corse of slain. . . .
Or in black armour stalk around
Embattled Bristowe, once thy ground,
And glow arduous on the Castle stair;
Or fiery round the Minster glare,
Let Bristowe still be made thy care;

Guard it from foemen and consuming fire,
Like Avon's stream encirc it round,
Nor let a flame enharm the ground,
Till in one flame all the whole world expire."

As for Horace Walpole, he was only a link in the chain of ignoble circumstances that led up to the suicide—for which act, however, it is absurd to make any one so responsible as the boy himself. Why should this conceited literary sybarite have been so very forward to befriend a sucking author who had hoaxed him? It is all fair for a nobleman to amuse himself by elaborately concocting a series of gossipy letters to be passed off as the offspring of unpremeditated friendly intercourse—and to tell lies about a trumpery "Otranto," writing when he is detected, "the author flatters himself he shall appear excusable"—but when a poor attorney's clerk plays similar pranks in a work of stupendous genius, then the noble "forger" bethinks him that "all of the house of forgery are relations," and that *his younger brother in "forgery" "must be a consummate villain."* (! !)

However, the publishers who profited by the boy's inexperience and obscurity in London were the more immediate authors of his loss to the world. They paid him little doles now and then; but for much of his work he was never paid at all, though his pieces kept coming out in the magazines of these gentlemen long after the boy had been crammed like a dead dog into a pauper's shell. "Hamilton," he said one day, "was using him very badly." And to think with what an ardent spirit he came to London; going to the coffee-houses among the celebrated wits, buying better clothes, and sending home little presents of teacups and fans and snuff to a mother and sister (of whom he was devotedly fond) out of his scanty earnings! I fancy his few letters home are among the most graphic, and cheerful, and melancholy in all the world; we are with him on the coach journey in the snow over Marlborough Down; we are his

fellow-passengers ; and how vivid the letter about his catching a cold looking out of his garret window at a drunken woman and a man with a movable fish-stall one night in Brooke Street ! His political letters are not a quarter so interesting to us now, though they served his turn well enough.

Was he mad or not when he killed himself ? If there was a predisposition—his sister had been in a madhouse—circumstances were very favourable to its fruition. He worked his brain—a brain truly of almost abnormal capacity—without mercy ; and he did not take sufficient nourishment. Even before he was compelled to live on next to nothing in London because the fat booksellers would not pay him, all agree that he starved on bread and water and tea. Whether he burnt the candle at both ends, and was profligate in morals, we do not know ; but I suspect that at any rate he devoted very little time to profligacy ; certainly he never drank. His anxieties, when he once began to despond, must have been of the gravest ; for he was doggedly determined never to write to Bristol for assistance, lest his acquaintance there should triumph, seeing how much he had boasted of what he could do, and what a great name he would make. Nineteen-twentieths of his composition consisted of *pride*, as he says in his letter to Mr. Clayfield ; we have it in his own handwriting in the British Museum, and the word is underlined. He had evidently the consciousness of his transcendent genius, and had come into contact with no equal. Cross, the apothecary, says that latterly his memory seemed to fail him when talking rapidly. Cross once persuaded Chatterton to dine with him, and then he devoured some oysters voraciously, so that he was evidently starving ; but for the most part he would accept even a morsel of bread from no one. However, he had always been dallying with the idea of suicide ; men did at that time if they had no religious belief, and the boy had lost his. In Bristol he was on the verge of

committing it, and wrote a half-serious, half-burlesque will, which so scared Lambert, the attorney, that he turned the boy out of his office. The mistaken idea that it is degrading to receive help from others—an idea due partly to the exaggerated individualism of the time—is pretty well enough to account for his conduct, whereas a man or woman ought to be ready to accept help with dignity, and with no sense of subserviency, as also to give it in a brotherly spirit and kindly, with no *arrière pensée* of establishing a claim thereby. Whether, however, there was not some madness in the dogged refusal to accept the smallest favour from any one at the last is a difficult question; only we do not know how far such favours were offered, and he was too proud to beg for them. It is strange that the landlady, Mrs. Angell, would never show herself to Croft when he went to inquire about Chatterton. But anyhow this is the boy “who,” according to Walpole, “might have been led to those more facile imitations of prose, promissory notes!” Well, England, after having spurned from her one of her greatest geniuses (as other nations, by the agency of their blockheads, have spurned theirs, the follies and sins of genius itself conspiring to help them), had many years after the misfortune to lose Horace Walpole also; and indignant denunciations seem absurd after so long, considering, too, how much fair-minded people always have to say on the other side of every question! There is some evidence that our great boy-poet was not carted away with other sour bodies when the graves at Shoe Lane Workhouse were filled up to make room for Farringdon Market, but that his mother had him sent down to Bristol, and privately buried in Redcliffe churchyard, where now he rests. Is there any authentic portrait of the poet? Sir H. Taylor has a very striking one, which he tells me he considers authentic. The boy is described as having magnificent grey eyes. Even Barrett said that “he used to send for him and differ from him on purpose to make them flash fire; fire

seemed to roll at the bottom of them." And Mrs. Ballance remarked that when he stared you in the face without appearing to see you "it was something awful." Of all the poetical tributes to him, perhaps Shelley's few lines are the finest. He comes forward in the realms of death to meet Keats:—

"The inheritors of unfulfilled renown
Rose from their thrones, built beyond mortal thought,
Far in the Unapparent. Chatterton
Rose pale, his solemn agony had not
Yet faded from him."

LORD BYRON AND HIS TIMES.*

“Sorrow seems half of his immortality.”—*Cain*.

BYRON is not an exhausted subject. For he, though one of our greatest poets, has of late years been under-estimated and neglected in England—a new school of poetry being in the ascendant, mainly an outgrowth from Keats, Wordsworth, Shelley, and foreign schools, Italian or French. It is remarkable that, whereas on the Continent neither of these last-named poets (except in some small degree Shelley) has to any extent influenced literature, while Byron has influenced it more than any other English poet except Shakespeare and Pope, among his own Anglo-Saxon people the reverse is true; for I know not any artist of note, English or American, unless it be Edgar Poe, Bulwer Lytton, Disraeli, Joaquin Miller, Mr. Alfred Austin, whom we may affiliate upon Byron; and these very partially. Of course he has had scores of imitators; but imitators, however popular for a moment, soon perish. I speak of original poets who are generally nurtured in some degree upon their predecessors. Hugo, Heine, de Musset, Béranger, and Lamartine occur at once as instances. But the Slavonic races also have heard his fiery tones, and responded in their poetry. Thus “the Russian poet, Puschkin, has stirred the ardent youth of Russia with a lyre attuned to that of Byron, and the most important Spanish poet of recent times has been

* By far the best thing I know on Byron (except Moore's *Life*) is Professor J. Nichol's book in the *English Men of Letters* series.

termed the Spanish Byron." In England, however, such Byronic growths as may be traced in literature (and there are few) have taken their nourishment from the more morbid elements in him. Notwithstanding his inordinately inorganic form, Mr. Dobell is a very genuine poet; but in the spasmodic school to which he belongs, a strange, half-tragic, half-grotesque figure seems always painfully prominent—the poet namely—at once admiring and bemoaning himself, torn asunder by his own passions, and loudly arraigning his Maker, as it were in the market-place, for making him so very disagreeable a person both to himself and to his neighbours.

There is little response in our literature, as there is in that of the Continent, to what is strongest and highest in Byron. He is pre-eminently the poet of revolution, and of what the Germans call "world-sorrow." But England is not a congenial home of revolution. There is implied in the Puritanism and Protestantism which dominated our two English rebellions a most conservative and law-abiding principle—one of obedience to authority. If the principle of private judgment as vindicated by Luther, Wyclif, Cranmer, and the Reformers, opened the door to what is now termed Rationalism, yet between them and the later rationalists there is a great gulf fixed; the former only shifted and restored the fulcrum of that lever which they held to have been displaced by human corruption, the lever of Supernatural authority; the latter threw away that lever altogether. In England, religion and the political constitution have been slowly and gradually liberalized; the Bible, however, remained (how far may we say, remains?) the fulcrum of authority, the rule of faith and conduct. In France, in Italy, in Spain, both religious and political reforms have met with less success, have been crushed in the bud; hence the tendency is to violent explosions in extremes of theory and practice, to what we moderns mean by the principle of revolution.

With respect to *Welt-Schmerz*, Goethe affirms that Byron introduced it into literature ; but I think that is saying too much. Rousseau rather is the father of it, though I am not sure we should not say Shakespeare in "Hamlet." Goethe himself in "Werther" and in "Faust" may likewise be regarded as one main source of the same spirit ; Jean Paul also, and other contemporaries of Goethe. But there has been so much of it since Byron, in France and Germany, that it is difficult now to recognize Byron as a grand fountain thereof in our more recent English literature. It is in Shelley, in Novalis, Obermann, Heine, Musset, Leopardi, George Sand. In Carlyle, Clough, Matthew Arnold, and Tennyson's "In Memoriam," how different a semblance it wears ! In these it is a reflecting, brooding, recluse-like sorrow, serene Wordsworth even traceable therein ; we behold the half-bewildering, half-apocalyptic suggestions of an ever-developing natural science seething in strange speculations ! Access since Byron has also been attained to the great systematic metaphysicians of Germany, whose thought has penetrated, at least by infiltration, through their German and French popularizers, to the stolid, practical, but rather obtuse English mind—these metaphysicians, together with Schiller, Goethe, and the German critics, constituting the Teutonic element in that vast intellectual and moral upheaval, which characterized the opening of the grand European era we name Revolutionary ; and as German ideas permeated France and England, so, thank Heaven ! are French and English principles of social change now conquering Germany, in spite of Bismarcks, Moltkes, and Emperors William. Moreover, Orientalists have made known to us the great religious philosophies of the East. Carlyle is a prophet of *welt-schmerz* and of individualism too, though he is most severe on Byron because of his lamentations. Yet Mr. Morley, with some reason, calls Carlyle "Byron with shaggy breast." He has been one of the strongest and most purifying prophets of our age, to

whom the gratitude of any generous pupil must be unflinching. But his stern and solitary Stoic pride passed into something of crabbed harshness. He has ever held up to us Goethe as the great modern hero in life and in literature. While of Byron, hear what he says:—"A strong man of recent time fights little for any good cause anywhere, works weakly as an English lord, weakly delivers himself from such working, with weak despondency endures the cackling of plucked geese at St. James', and sitting in sunny Italy in his coach and four, writes over many reams of paper the following sentence with variations, 'Saw ever the world one greater or unhappier?' This was a sham strong man."

Now, if Byron's actual career be remembered—and I shall presently remind my readers of it—this will seem nothing but a marvellous and most unwarranted caricature. Yet even when Byron is most absorbed in his own sorrow—and very surely he is not always so absorbed—he is unconsciously and by force of genius the mouthpiece and representative of those who (like our own selves, how often in this epoch of weary individualism!) feel "the weight and burden of all this unintelligible world" pressing upon their heart. He is the Human Soul, with infinite longings, that nothing finite can satisfy, yet finding nought that it can recognize as indeed infinite to rest upon. Cease your vain whinings after enjoyment! says Carlyle; if you suffer, like the Spartan boy conceal the ravening agony and say nothing. What right hast thou to happiness, even to being? Possess thy soul in patience and work! This is noble and well; so far as it goes better than Byron. But this in Carlyle rests on a faith, such a faith as Byron had not. And there are, perhaps, objections to this too stoical repudiation of happiness. May it not tend to some undue acquiescence in the unhappiness of others? May it not tend to repress that "enthusiasm of humanity," which must at least include the desire of imparting happiness to all? It at any rate rather suggests fox and grapes. This ascetic

independence of human sympathy and approbation, as of all innumerable nature-provided *external* springs of enjoyment, this haughty, assiduous self-culture, may possibly result in a certain lonely callousness of heart, ungladdened and ungraced with tenderly humane sensibilities, in a certain stern self-satisfaction which may not really be more noble than the self-loathing of a Manfred. "Thus I trample on the pride of Plato," said Diogenes, treading on the philosopher's purple robe. "With greater pride, Diogenes," replied the sage.

In Carlyle, surely the bitter wailings over man's present condition are even deeper than Byron's—and fully as misanthropic—while he hardly manifests the same generous ardour of sympathy toward the efforts of mankind, however ineffectual, to free themselves from oppression, and enter upon the heritage of their manhood. Byron was a miserable man amongst miserable men, but their helpful brother in the blind groping toward light. This latter, indeed, Carlyle strives and means to be; and he is miserable enough; but perhaps he too much ignores the common and irrepressible instincts of human nature, calling man to impossible heights of renunciation and self-centred contentment, refusing to aid them in attaining humbler human happiness more within their reach, and the general development of those human faculties, which they have a right to claim. A school-master's rod for the foolish, naughty masses of men! Surely the moral *dragonnades* of Carlyle's fierce invectives against the criminal classes (in "Latter-Day Pamphlets") are almost inhuman in their indiscriminating pitilessness—further from Christ's "God be merciful to me, a sinner!" than anything of Byron's. But happiness is, though not the *whole* of our being's end and aim, an integral part of it. What Byron lacked was a sane mind in a sane body. He thirsted unduly after pure enjoyment, without that necessary shadow of pain which must accompany it; and he did not, as Carlyle justly points out, face that pain so

courageously as he should have done. Yet a more iron nature must allow for the acute sensibilities of such a man; he was one nerve for pleasure or for pain to travel over—and surely such a nature is not without its rare uses in the world. But the truth is (as we have lately learned) that Carlyle did most of his cursing and swearing in private, and Byron a good deal of his in public. That was, on the whole, the difference between them. Besides, albeit too ostentatiously, and with too much weeping, he *did* defy and endure his anguish after all, as do his heroes; he, in addition, silencing it altogether at the last, in order to set right the time “out of joint” (which necessity, laid on him by Duty, this contemplative man, like Hamlet, must have felt to be “a cursed spite”), actually laying down the pen and taking up the sword—nay, more than the sword, for which he had some love, the prosaic entanglement of practical politics also, for which he had none, and showing therein admirable good sense. I do not find that Goethe, for instance, had the smallest inclination to do anything of the sort—showed any keen interest even in the piteous struggles of his fellow-men—that he left to his great rival, Schiller, to Fichte, and Theodor Körner; though indeed Goethe, in his most immortal work, “Faust,” as in “Werther,” and his best drama, “Goetz,” is not the serene Olympian, the pure artist, which is apparently what Mr. Carlyle admires in him.

But Byron knew not moderation or self-restraint; he was so spiritually infirm as to gratify every whim; thus came satiety and remorse. Mazzini, the illustrious Duty-loving apostle of these latter days, whose life was one long sacrifice for human welfare, and who yet never pandered for his own advantage to popular errors, takes a far juster view of Byron, and in spite of all his faults reverences in him not only the great poet, but the noble man. Of his characters, Mazzini says, “They are gifted with ability they know not how to use; with a power and energy they know not how

to apply ; with a life whose purpose and aim they comprehend not. *They are alone* ; this is the secret of their wretchedness and impotence. They thirst for good, but cannot achieve it ; for they have no mission, no belief, no comprehension of the world around them. They have never realized the conception of *humanity* ; the continuity of labour that unites all the generations into one whole ; the common end and aim only to be realized by the common effort. The emptiness of the life and death of solitary individuality has never been so powerfully and efficaciously summed up as in the pages of Byron. His intuition of the death of a form of society, men call wounded self-love ; his sorrow for *all*, is misinterpreted as cowardly egotism. Whilst Byron withered and suffered under a sense of the wrong and evil around him, Goethe attained the calm—I cannot say of victory—but of indifference. ‘Religion and politics,’ said he, ‘are a troubled element for art. I have always kept myself aloof from them as much as possible.’ The day will come when democracy will remember what it owes to Byron. I know no more beautiful symbol of the future destiny and mission of Art than the death of Byron in Greece. The holy alliance of poetry with the cause of the people—the union, still so rare, of thought and action—the grand solidarity of all nations in the conquest of the rights ordained by God for all his children—all that is now the religion and the hope of the party of progress in Europe, is gloriously typified in this image.”

Indirectly, Kepler, Galileo, Descartes, Newton, Locke, and Bacon ; more directly, Hobbes, Spinoza, and Pope ; later still, Helvetius, Hume, Gibbon, Voltaire, Rousseau, and the Encyclopædists, had, as spokesmen of their time, rudely shaken the venerable but decrepit fabrics of religion and society—because in truth the Divine Life once in them was no longer there, was secretly creating for itself newer and sounder habitations. The structure was unsound at heart, eaten to the core, though it still might stand

externally whole and fair. Religion took the side of evil, the side of the powerful oppressor, of the tyrant; she imposed dogmas, moreover, upon men, that daily grew more incredible with the progress of discovery, and hoped still to stunt the intellect and conscience of mankind with bands and swaddling-clothes belonging to their infancy. Europe felt the shock of revolution, and trembled. Nevertheless, when the allied nations had overthrown the mighty dictator, Napoleon—that Titan sprung from the loins of revolution, governing in the name of the people, and at least ostensibly in their interest, disposing of Europe in his own anarchic fashion, with little regard to the consecrated pretensions of ancient priests or ancient kings—there came a reaction, and lo! the old orthodox spirit returned with seven others more oppressive than itself. “The Holy Alliance considered it not unholy to leave unfulfilled the promise given to nations in the hour of trial, to beat down by force of arms their right to self-government, which had been bought at the price of much precious blood, and to treat nations at their congresses like herds of cattle.” “When the Holy Alliance (says Gervinus) believed that it had arrested for ever the aberrations of the spirit of revolution by the subjugation of France, then this English poet knit again the thread, which a million of soldiers had been called forth to sever for ever.” The state of the world was one great dissonance, and Byron, who possessed the special organ of its expression, became the poet of this crisis. That he had sacrificed his life for Greece and freedom, surrounded his name with a halo of glory: this martyr-death became an inspiring theme for poetry and passion. And what, after all, if in this and other acts of his life, there was some imaginative taste for artistic *effect*, some desire, it may be, of applause? Is that so very shocking? Human motives are mixed, and by mixed motives human progress is secured. There *are* aspects of human affairs other than the moral.

Byron stood prominently before mankind, a man of high social position, and even with aristocratic proclivities—in this, too, meeting his time half-way, for the reformers of the Continent were often aristocratic like himself—with romantic and fascinating personality, a man of the world as well as a cosmopolitan poet, obtruding his defiant revolt and uncompromising individuality no less in life than in poetry. An exile from England, Byron openly assisted the Carbonari of Italy, and in every way proved himself the friend of human freedom all over the world. No wonder that the liberal youth of the Continent were stirred profoundly by his words and example. Italy and Greece are free. But how disappointing often were the results of youthful enthusiasm and aspirations! More fruit was expected from sweeping political changes than could in the slow growth of human history possibly result—even if the changes themselves were found practicable or beneficial, and even if an ideal state could be created by any external arrangement whatsoever. The kingdom of God is within. A king may be a pauper in spirit, and a pauper may be a king of men. Healthy desire for self-government was repressed under tyrannical rulers where these retained or regained the power, and here intelligent youth was forced to champ the bit, resorting perforce to more animal, selfish, and sordid outlets of activity. The boundless spirit of discontent let loose over the world caused more unhappiness than the former submissive acquiescence in any lot, however degraded. The old world was passing from under men's feet—but where was the promised land? Shouting "freedom," men but "wore the name engraven on a heavier chain. The sensual and the dark rebel in vain."

The right of private judgment, as vindicated by the Renaissance and Reformation, was pushed to such an extreme, that not so much the higher individual, with his own special, rational idea, in essential harmony with all others, was enthroned, but rather the capricious, anti-social,

disorganizing individual—which exaggeration by inevitable reaction leads to the riveting of new dogmatic chains upon the limbs of unemancipated humanity, and so to renewed triumph of corrupt hierarchies. In proportion to a man's enlargement of intellect and intensity of sympathy was his sorrow; man was—nay, still is—a discord and burden to himself—that is, if he be more than a mere animal, or selfish member of the privileged classes—if his mind march in harmony with the progress of the “world-spirit.” So far as in Byron's day the general conclusions of modern science, born in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, shone for all, they only served to flicker dim distrust from afar upon time-honoured convictions and serviceable beliefs. For Byron all is still doubt, negation, and despair. Nor can he whistle, and chatter, and grin more or less complacently and comfortably over the human welter, like a Voltaire or a Diderot: in fact, the storm has burst since then; one can no longer nestle in old cosy nooks of courts that one is helping to shake about the ears of one's children; “After us, the deluge,” but the deluge has come. “Let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die,” will not quite satisfy Rousseau and Byron.

Yet negation and despair have never in any general sense been so unmixed in England as they were with Byron.* Since German criticism, and the development of modern science, our scepticism is more profound and common than before; still it is more philosophical, quiet, and discriminating than his, feeling its way, in however tentative a manner, to a reconstruction of religion, not on the whole attempting to shatter it altogether. Shelley, Coleridge, Wordsworth, and Tennyson, for instance, poets of faith, though they were ignored as long as possible, have now

* Those most distinguished poets, James Thomson, and Edgar Poe, are distinctly exceptional in their tone. But we have become much more pessimistic, dogmatic in denial, blank in agnosticism of late years. Idiosyncrasy of temper, habit, and circumstance, however, explains much in the cases of Leopardi, Schopenhauer, Poe, and Thomson.

more influence over our spiritual life than Byron. Byron's mocking, half-earnest, half-eighteenth-century temper is ill in accordance with our present attitude; scepticism is reverent in an age, which has produced such earnest and illustrious Christians as Newman and Maurice. But the English public of Byron's own day were less tolerant of his irreligion than the same public is now. The legal authorities were on the point of refusing to protect his publisher's copyright in the case of "Cain" and the "Vision of Judgment." If Christianity is by our leading thinkers politely ignored, at least it is ignored *politely*. Our tendency to vindicate the glory and dignity of the body as against orthodox asceticism is, however, a return in Byron's direction. And there are symptoms of reaction against that elaborate, artificial affectation of poetic style, which is characteristic of an age in England that calls itself *practical*—fairly domestic, devoted heart and soul to those material gains, which involve, on the one hand, a population of grimy native helots, who, being degraded from their higher humanity, murmur, yet forbear from violence, and, on the other, a population of Judases, ready to sell their very Master (in the "dearest market") for thirty pieces of silver, or less—each individual, and the whole nation being careless of the rights or wrongs of any neighbour. From this sort of public life our poets withdraw themselves into studies and studios, there by the help of culture, criticism, and revived antiquity, elaborating their native tongue, as a recent critic in the *Quarterly* observes, into the most celestial of Chinese; in which I think we partly discern, indeed, the result of richer thought and more complex imaginative feeling, but chiefly that of deficient interest in action, and deficient variety of true passion. Feeling and thought lose themselves in tortuous labyrinths of wordy filigree, ostensibly provided for their *habitat*; one sickly sentiment is diluted homœopathically in oceans of what is called "exquisite expression." The literary influences at work to

produce this result may be traced up to the sources I indicated at the beginning. Though Lord Tennyson's lyrics are among the most beautiful in the language, and he himself is a master of true expression—for he has much to express—indeed, his sovereignty over language and metre is wonderful—yet he has an occasional mannerism which is dangerously catching, and which inferior writers are sure to exaggerate. His high Miltonic standard, both of poetic substance and artistic workmanship, however, has raised the whole general tone of English writers and readers, and to him we owe all grateful allegiance. But Byron had formed his style on Pope and Dryden, two great models of clear, nervous English; and it would certainly be well if we studied them more, together with Milton, Wordsworth, Scott, and Byron himself.

Another word as to this element of welt-schmerz, which the continental critics justly conceive to be so eminently characteristic of Byron. Nearly all great writing, we must remember, nearly all great art, has been sorrowful or tragic. Even the favoured youthful Greeks, with their healthful unconsciousness and exquisite instinct, in harmony with their surroundings, once out of Homer's heroic age (and there is high tragedy in Homer), have their great dramatists composing terrible dramas of relentless, overwhelming Fate. Turn to the grand Hebrew poets. What of Isaiah, Jeremiah, Solomon? Then, if we except our own early poet, Chaucer, and examine the most illustrious of Christian poets, we shall be led to the same conclusion. Take Shakespeare, Dante, and Milton—Shakespeare, with all his rich humanity, and buoyant humour, how profoundly sorrowful, how terribly tragic! "*Wo du das genie erblickst erblickst du auch die martyr krone.*" It was the Olympian Goethe who said that. But our gods are not the pagan Olympians. Our God is the Man of Sorrows; and we hold His life and death to be more godlike than any Greek contentment with any present lot, however enviable. We

ourselves suffer more ; new ideas, new imaginings, new endeavours entail a heritage of more complex pain, bewilderment, and disappointment ; we can no longer lead the gay, healthful life of a Greek ; and if we were ever so favoured, how, since Christ, shall we be happy when so vast a proportion of our brethren are miserable, for has not Christ taught us that even helots and barbarians are our brethren ? “ *Une immense espérance a traversé la terre* ”—henceforth unrest is the law of our existence ; and what if the Star of Hope have set ? It is here, we believe ; but for Byron, labouring in the deep trough of a dark billow of the world-ocean, the huge travelling wave of sorrow had blotted it away ! And how, asks Mr. Symonds, in his brilliant poet’s book on the Greek poets, shall a race in its maturity, with centuries of sad history behind it, be joyful ? Yet is there much of glory and joy in this history. Nor are we in our old age. For see how in Byron’s day Nelson and Wellington fought ; how we have taken and held India, and colonized the world ; how Livingstone and our great explorers penetrate the heart of mysterious continents ; while ghostly ramparts of the old world’s seclusion fall at our mere presence, as those strong walls of Jericho fell before the trumpet-blast of Israel ! * But in advanced civilizations, with over-swollen luxury of the few, and contrasted misery of the many, the noblest must be saddest—especially students, who live that unhealthy life which exaggerated division of labour, and a sedentary habit, has entailed upon them. To this must be added a peculiar, wild, melancholy characteristic of Northern peoples in their damp, chill atmosphere, and dark, romantic scenery—that melancholy which we feel in solemn purple mountains, umbrageous forests, turbulent grey seas, and which has passed alike into the primitive national songs, into the glory of Gothic cathedrals, into the taciturn, rugged character of our common

* Franklin, Gordon, Lawrence, Havelock, Edwardes, Watt, Stevenson, these also are names for a nation to be proud of !

people. Moreover, in Byron there was a lingering belief in that very distinctive orthodoxy which he denied—even in the doctrine of everlasting punishment, and a revengeful God, which he denounced so vehemently—those Pagan monstrosities which the world will be well rid of at whatever cost. Good service as he has done us herein, these dogmas still manifestly haunted him. Nor had Byron the power of thought necessary for shaping for himself our eternal Christianity anew ; but in the form of some illogical semi-theistic fatalism, Calvinism still appears in his writings, in his conversations, in his conduct.

The concentrated gloom of many Puritan generations on the one hand, and many half-insane lonely barbaric nobles on the other, haunted his brain like some phantom mist, waiting only to be summoned into palpable Horror by individual experiences of the man—which assuredly were not wanting ! In the very face of his unbelief, nay, in the very face of his personally unsensitive conscience as to those carnal excesses which Christianity brands with severest reprobation, his sense of guilt is in some moods manifestly overwhelming ; almost equal to that of St. Paul—or, if you prefer it, reminding one of Judas.

Of Byron personally we have but to remember that his own early youth was nourished by stern, dark influences of Northern sea and sky, and heath-clad rocky mountain, in a land haunted by weird legend ; pride of race was in his blood—pride of the old Barons Byron, and the yet more illustrious ancestry of his impoverished mother ; she who taught the sullen, brooding child to be so conscious of his high position, and to resent the disproportion between his fallen fortunes and the greatness of his house ; she who, while injudiciously fond, yet taunted him with his lameness when angry—a lameness that so treated might well help to make him bitter. What an education was this boy's, who needed such extrajudicious and kindly moral training ! But fierce and ungovernable as his mother's moods were,

his grandfather's had been the same—he who killed his neighbour in a savage duel by candle-light, and lived afterwards, grimly secluded in the old abbey at Newstead, shunned and gloomy, and accused of half-insane eccentricities (himself a very Lara), as the boy heard when he and his mother arrived at their ancestral abode, so ancient, lonely, and ruinous. With dim traditions and ghost-tales of old monks hovering about the place, and emblazoned arms of warriors on the windows, what wonder if this boy poet imbibed an air of mystery and mediæval romance? A very exquisite description has he given of his early home in "Don Juan," showing how profoundly it had impressed him. As for his father, he was a handsome *roué*, like Don Juan himself. How must the modern revolutionary spirit have contended in this man for mastery with the temper of a haughty English aristocrat—the haughtier for his poverty—with the epicurean tastes, moreover, of a beautiful dandy, and petted child of high society!* But he needed the stimulus of insult, of rejection, of opprobrium, to rouse the slumbering lion, to develop his mighty genius in the direction proper to it.

The "Hours of Idleness" are melancholy and querulous, but they have no concentrated bitterness or agony. He

* There was indeed the feudal independence of a lawless baron piercing through his post-revolutionary humanitarianism, both in conduct and in poetry. It is true that he hated the stupid traditional orthodoxy of Legitimists, but he sincerely liked those imposing despotisms that are on one side the modern offspring of old tyrannies. He admired Napoleon; loved to imitate and be compared with him; also Ali Pacha, and thought of setting up a Pachalik himself on some Greek island; if he had been offered the crown of Greece at the congress of Salona, to attend which he was on the point of setting out when he died, Trelawny and Dr. Elze both think he would have accepted it. He burst out crying from flattered vanity when his name was first read out with "Dominus" before it at Harrow—and hated people to call him by his name without the "Lord." He quarrelled with our ambassador at Constantinople on a point of precedence—would not land at Malta because he expected a salute from the forts, and finally sneaked into La Valetta without it, as Galt relates with a chuckle. The pomp of his travelling arrangements after the separation was excessive and worse than absurd, for the meanest thing he ever did was to use his wife's fortune after that event.

says himself, he should "never have worn the motley mantle of the poet, if some one had not told him to forego it." The taste of his true quality comes out first in the "English Bards;" though even that is chiefly noticeable for wounded vanity, and talent in the region of sarcasm. After this he travelled, on his return publishing successively the "Tales," and "Childe Harold." In these he put himself forward under thin literary disguises as a melancholy hero of romance, and a *roué*: the result being, that he "woke one morning and found himself famous." Never was there such sudden and general popularity, partly due, no doubt, to the fact that he was a peer, and a *parti* who mixed freely in society, with the special recommendations of beautiful face and figure, "interesting" genius, *spirituel* conversation, and the vague reputation of being charmingly wicked; so he got as much petting as any reigning belle, and gave himself airs accordingly. But he was soon to pay the penalty of good fortune. He had been overpraised for the work actually performed, and he had, moreover, made enemies among men and women by his successes, and his affectations, though chiefly, no doubt, by his sterling merits, which men, and especially literary men, were not likely to forgive. He had married a truly excellent and noble lady, who perhaps wished to reform him, but soon retired in disgust from a task which she found so far beyond her powers. This marriage, with little affection, and with no mutual comprehension or toleration, was soon broken up; and then, no one knows exactly how, the darkest rumours gathered about the husband, bursting anon over his head in a tempest of most virtuous execration, wherein the notoriously sensitive holiness of English society in the days of the Regency showed itself, like Hamlet's father, "much offended." Byron, indeed, fancied there might be some cant in all that, having himself seen something of this holiness when it sat knee to knee with him, cheek by jowl with him, drinking, and ogling—though

Mrs. Stowe appears to believe in it. The fact is, he had no business to be a genius, and to sin out of the regular grooves in which it is proper and respectable for good society to sin. So villainous fashionable seducers, and fraudulent tradesmen, "compounded for sins they were inclined to, by damning those they had no mind to," waving him aside as less pious than themselves. And he who confessed that the meanest thing's blame gave him more pain than the highest man's praise gave him pleasure—how must he have winced under the insult and opprobrium that raged around him, even though in his heart he contemned most of the amateur inquisitors who inflicted punishment. The finest skins are the most sensitive—what a triumph for vermin! No doubt there are men of cold, serene, self-possessed temperament, who are as thoroughly independent of their fellows as Byron professed to be, but, as has been said, these do not print so many passionate cantos to inform their fellows of the fact. Why, he winced even when a nameless jackass donned the lion's-skin of some ephemerally popular review, and brayed at his poetry from under it. He could not be content with enduring fame, and the consciousness of good work done; but must needs clutch at immense and immediate reputation, though that was to be shared with him by jugglers and acrobats, literary or otherwise. Hence in part the blot of sensationalism, to catch the uneducated taste for gaudiness of effect, in his work.

Byron, moreover, burnt the candle at both ends. Think what an amount of intellectual labour—and that of a creative kind—of a fierce, emotional, imaginative kind—this man went through before he was thirty-seven! How bulky are his works; and in addition we have the long destroyed memoirs, the innumerable letters sparkling with wit, teeming with observation. Besides, he lived always, and lived moreover in early youth, the life of a *roué*. These conditions alone are sufficient, when we take into account

his highly nervous, excitable, delicate organization, and the deleterious amount of spirits he drank, to explain his fits of depression, his moments of anguish. He was subject, moreover, to constant fevers, than which nothing is more depressing. So that on the whole, considering the utterly different nature and circumstances of the two men, it does not seem as if Mr. Carlyle's reiterated reproach to Byron, that he was no stoic, amounted to very much.

I own I think the "Tales" are underrated by modern critics. All their defects may be granted—they are fragmentary, the plots are ill-constructed, sometimes almost *nil*, they are monotonous, and, above all, there is a certain theatrical hollowness about them, which is indeed the vulnerable Achilles'-heel of Byron for his modern detractors. Nevertheless, the episodes, even if they be only episodes, are in themselves wonderfully astir with wild life and turbulent passion; the verse is generally musical and rapid, while often we have a pause of softer lyrical beauty with an exquisite perfume of its own, to which Scott far more rarely attains. Thus almost all the passages (though they can be detached and recited as separate lyrics) in the "Giaour" are beautiful, and how lovely are the opening lines about the lovers in "Parisina" as well as that incident of the page bending over dying Lara! The "Corsair," on the whole, seems to me the finest and most spirited of this series; it has in it all the freshness of youth and buoyant enjoyment, as well as the very spirit of romance and troubadour love; it has women, charming, beautiful, tender, and passionate, pathetic passages, and some of the finest lines that have ever been written about the sea, even by Byron, the bounding clarion notes of the pirate's opening song—"O'er the glad waters of the dark blue sea." By some able modern critics, indeed, accustomed to our thoughtful, metaphysical, academic, or domestic strains, all except one phase of Byron's mighty genius (that of "Don Juan," and "Vision of Judgment") has been abandoned,

on the ground that it is theatrical, and conventional ; that his heroes are not heroic. Now this has a great deal of truth in it, and Byron acknowledges himself that these early works were too sentimental and stagey. Still, for all that, something may be said even in favour of their general conception, in favour of that central ideal which gave them such unity as they possess.

It does not follow, because a myriad dunces have mouthed, and still mouth in the trappings of a great actor, and we weary of these trappings, that he was not a great actor. What astonished Walter Scott was this—that Byron, though in “Childe Harold,” and we may even say in “Cain” and “Manfred,” as well as in the “Tales,” he continued to represent only one human figure as the centre of all, could still succeed in forcibly arresting men’s attention. In truth, he wears the tragic mask of an actor in old Greek tragedy—set to one monotonous, terrible, or sorrowful expression : his heroes are ideals of human misfortune, sin, woe, and passionate power, that partly recall those of Greek drama. This gloomy Byronic hero is now the favourite type of low melodrama in cheap fiction and on the stage—a capital subject, moreover, for burlesque. Nevertheless, he was at that time a perfectly legitimate and fascinating hero of romance, by virtue of certain obvious and indestructible tendencies to admire, very common in human nature. He was, in fact, a personage of the *same order* as Hamlet, Timon, Faust, Wagner’s Tannhäuser, and Fouqué’s magical creation, Sintram. He must be accepted as a modern descendant of mediæval Barons and Minstrels—truly an *evil* modern Knight, with conscience restless from remorse, with high gifts of intellect and imagination, thirsting for joy and for pure love, yet clogged with satiety, withered with disappointment, endowed, however, with many knightly virtues, in all the pride of blasted beauty and high lineage degraded ; even in the bosom of Nature, the Healer whom he adores as Divine, haunted by melancholy wrecks of his own spiritual

life. This semi-knight, and semi-Miltonic Satan, is an embodiment of rebellion against God and man; yet of reconciliation with both through love of Mercy and Justice; half in harmony with the modern spirit, half in harmony with the ancient that is passing away; it has, moreover, even a moral beauty of its own, as of a human ruin stern and lonely in proud decay, festooned with some of Nature's fairest perennial flowers. But it is eminently romantic and picturesque—Gothic, fantastic, all light and shadow, mystery, and vast space, flushed here with gorgeous colours, there grey and severe—neither “classical,” nor flippant, courtly, and didactic, like poetry of the eighteenth century; nor moralized, and beginning to be reconciled in its own fashion with the old faith, like Lord Tennyson's and some of our best poetry now—a transition poetry of tumult and revolt, of volcanic, aggressive individualism, half reverting to the lawlessness and anarchy of primæval societies; to the Ishmaelite whose hand is against every man; the child of Nature asserting himself against the decadence of an artificial, decrepit, tyrannical civilization, wrongfully usurping the titles and thunders of the Most High. This is as truly romantic as Spenser, Walter Scott, Ariosto, or the Minnesingers. “Faust,” and “Manfred” are in fact the legitimate descendants of this mediæval poetry—even of the early Mysteries and Miracle-Plays. Moreover, Spenser, and the Italian romantic poets, are quite as luscious in description as Byron; *that* element they owe in common to the study of later classical literature—Theocritus, Virgil, Ovid—and some of it to that of the East, Byron personally having a good deal of the soft, luxurious Eastern in him, developed by personal experience in eastern climes. It must be recollected further that the old heroes of romance, for the most part *sans peur*, were very seldom *sans reproche*. But the elements of moral mystery, tragical destiny, high gifts rendered abortive and a curse to the possessor, and what may be termed the more superficial graces of these

heroes, all these, wrought up with the skill of a Byron, whose "own" the "song" was, form a fine subject for artistic presentation in the romantic region of art; they appeal to the imagination of mankind, to such imaginations as those of Goethe, Shelley, Coleridge, and Scott; although, indeed, the perpetual repetition of such portraiture showed the narrow range at that period of the poet's power. His, indeed, were not self-possessed, self-sacrificing heroes of the highest type, like Schiller's William Tell. But it is not necessary to hold them up as models for imitation, even though Byron may have a vain, self-conscious weakness for these violent, ill-regulated, selfish characters. At any rate, however low morally his poetic ideal might be (and *one* of his ideals was Washington, as he tells us in a splendid stanza of "Childe Harold," and as we might know by his life), the question for criticism is how far his figures are portrayed with the hand of a master; and it was certainly because he could identify himself with them in some moods that he portrayed them so well. Whatever an artist can render artistically interesting by art, that is a proper subject for art; it becomes imaginative truth; but the error of certain writers has been to distort some lower elements of human nature by making them relatively too prominent, and not duly contrasting them with other elements. Byron made himself in "Childe Harold," not too obtrusively, the centre of his graphic and imaginative descriptions of countries over which centuries of stirring and splendid history expand wings of dusky glory, and surely the brooding, melancholy figure was no inappropriate centre; a beautiful genius of death, of sorrow, and of unrest. Ever he held up before the world a vast and lurid Human Image, but too thoroughly aware of its own dignity, and contemning others—herein reverting to the philosophic pride of elect spirits as inculcated by Paganism, and adapted thence by doctors of theology into Christianity, under the guise of religious Pharisaism (but retrograding from the true Christian ideal

of election to universal service), and now reappearing in Academic halls under the name of "Culture," as intellectual pride—scarcely malignant, yet formed to be the ruin of all who approached; like Job, deserted in his calamity, yet justifying himself in the face of Heaven as against hypocritical moral verdicts of his fellows; communing alone in whirlwind and cloud with phantoms of departed heroes, and vanished empires—Harold, in starlit palaces of the Cæsars, among ivied rents of ruin, or upon the solitary seashore—Manfred upon some desolate Alp, conversing familiarly with spirits of the elements; for whom the very countenance of Love herself has been contorted into the Gorgon-face of Crime—Crime with fury features and snaky hair. In what terrible harmony is this figure, half-man, half-demon, with these blasted crags that surround him, born of old in throes of earthquake and in fire, snowed upon out of the slow centuries, shrouded in oceans of implacable ice! So looms this awful Image out of the storm-cloud, as though stricken with the curse of a hateful immortality; wandering through all lands, bearing the burden of a world's sorrow, wailing the wail of human misery, like Prometheus on Caucasus, scarred with Heaven's lightning, and blistered with His frost, agonizing for sins inherited and imposed; but, alas! bearing no message for human redemption; no conscious martyr-conqueror of sacred fire from divine altars, wherewithal to regenerate the race; only lifting ever a red right hand with Cain, and huge scowling armies of the outcast—rebel leader of all who are miserable, fate-stricken, and oppressed—testifying in the face of God and men that all is not well, as the comfortable have decreed, though they feast with a smile over buried bodies of their victims.

It seems to me uncritical to draw too broad a line of demarcation between the early and later works of Byron, though it is unquestionably right to prefer the later; but the same identical, intense, passionate, susceptible, scornful

soul appears in all. And it is part of the very essence of this strange shroud of romantic, half-chivalrous mystery wherewith Byron loves to invest his characters, and through them indirectly his own personality, that there should glow, as it were, doubtfully through the folds thereof a certain deadly lurid light of guilt unnameable, whose inborn fatality overwhelms the soul with despair, and leaves the man no rest. This is especially the element that is now inveighed against as poisonous and satanic—now indicated as clap-trap and humbug.

But it may be argued that as Byron has used the blood-red hue, it is a perfectly legitimate, as well as effective, element of tragic interest in his work of art. Toned down to harmony with other features of the picture, represented as in some sense a mysterious doom—guilt, and the misery which it works in a soul not destitute of virtue and aspirations after a higher life—these elements in Byron appear to me neither immoral, nor inartistic, nor ridiculous. Is it the duty of the artist always to hold up before us models of excellence for imitation? If so, of course we must condemn Byron, and enthrone Miss Edgeworth or Mr. Tupper. But then, what of Othello and Iago, Macbeth, Lady Macbeth, the Duchess of Malfi, and most of those other mixed humanities of Elizabethan drama? What of *Œdipus* and *Medea*? indeed, of all the greatest masters in imaginative creation? Byron's representations do not, I think, ignore the *difference* between good and evil, any more than those of Shakespeare do, though they may indicate laxity in his own estimate of what is right and wrong, in certain respects. I do not see, for instance, that he violates the conditions under which evil may be represented, even as laid down in the essays of Mr. R. H. Hutton; only that Mr. Hutton perhaps insists too much (by implication) on the moral aspect of a subject being always prominently presented. That Byron *dwells too much* on the passionate, and so far weak class of characters, and that these are not sufficiently

balanced by other types may be admitted. Herein he proves himself an artist inferior to the greatest. But his heroes may point a moral while they adorn a tale. There certainly arose at that time—Byron and Rousseau contributing much to the phenomenon—a kind of priesthood, which, claiming to displace the old, showed itself scarcely more tolerant and tender in its bearing toward the common people, in favour of whose rights its members had ostensibly arisen, than that traditional priesthood against whose tyranny they so iconoclastically declaimed. Every “man of genius” became a sort of supreme pontiff without a faith, whose whims, and weaknesses, and peculiar fancies were to be held as sacred—a pretension perhaps more dangerous than those of a regular priesthood, since these were at least defined and confirmed by venerable authorities in the world’s face. Sensitive young persons, moreover, persuaded themselves too easily that *they* were within this privileged indefinable circle, being naturally eager to claim a right of participating in such agreeable immunities; so that the ranks of this new priesthood did not want for candidates, whose credentials there existed unfortunately no recognized bishop once for all to verify. Doubtless, then, too much emphasis was laid by Rousseau, Byron, and Shelley, upon mere sentiment, impulse, and passion, as distinguished from conscience, reason, and deliberate self-control. So far as Byronism is to be regarded as an ideal, it is certainly a low one; though, at the same time, it is unquestionably a higher than that of the average Mammon-worshipping Briton, and on the whole advantageous as a corrective of his; while Byron sets before the Englishman, assuredly, certain high qualities for which the *élite* of his nation have been deservedly celebrated, and not least that aristocracy to which the poet belonged. Nor is it amiss that the average man should learn to reverence genius and superiority, and the glories of external Nature. If Byron lays undue stress on such advantages as those of rank and high lineage—on those of beauty, strength,

proWess, or refinement—methinks his work is full of counterbalancing influences ; and these things themselves may not be quite so despicable as commonplace, levelling-down democracy supposes. Science is teaching us not unduly to despise *race*, as instinct had taught us before ; moreover, since soul and body are but reverse faces of the same living man or woman, I doubt beauty of body being so execrable a thing as ill-favoured Methodism would persuade us. Then, again, though the protest is a healthy one which vigorous moralists, like Mr. Kingsley, have made against that foolish, mischievous notion, that men of genius are privileged in their errors and weaknesses, instead of possessing their high gifts for purposes of human service, we must not altogether forget that virtue is not knowledge or sensibility, but rather, a due balance of the faculties under a moral sense. Artistic genius is, on the other hand, a very uncommon sensibility and corresponding faculty dominating the possessor : it would certainly be well if with this were always associated that balance and moral sense we call virtue. But is it always so, and is it likely to be generally so ? In proportion as sympathies and susceptibilities are acute in one direction, must there be danger of undue predominance ; and in proportion to their variety will be the probability of some one interfering now and again with the claims of another. When a man feels a multitude of conflicting impulses, aspirations, and longings, he must be endowed with an exceptionally virtuous spirit in order for him to keep the middle path of virtue as securely and invariably as another. But it does not follow that he must be so endowed. He sees life, and a special phase of life haloed with the aureole of imagination ; the reality disappoints him : he then revolts against his condition, and seeks some other, not always with due regard for the claims of a partner, nor with the tender long-suffering he owes her. His mobility of temperament, and ardour of imagination are in arms against his constancy and duty.

That men of genius have, for the most part, been unhappy in their domestic relations has been often affirmed and explained, and perhaps cannot well be denied. Happy are they who have proved exceptions! happy in the noble, gentle partners God gave them, and possibly in their own highly gifted moral natures. But I do not see why sinners of genius should be inveighed against as *ipso facto* greater sinners than average men. Shakespeare, for instance, gives one the notion of complete sanity, and balanced universality in genius; yet what we know of his history, and what we read in the Sonnets does not favour the idea of a perfectly proper person, who could have written perfectly proper articles in the *Saturday Review*. There is no use blinking the fact, moreover, that riot, self-indulgence, and the irregular life Byron lived made him just the great specific poetic personality he was—the very interpreter of his time. He drew more than any poet from personal experience, and his strongly marked passionate, wandering career gave him the materials of his strongest and intensest poetry. What would this man have done if he had “lived at home and at ease?” if he had gone out shooting all his life with Sir Ralph Milbanke, and only listened over his wine to “that damnable monologue which elderly gentlemen are pleased to call conversation?” He might have gone to church at Kirkby Mallory on Sunday, fulfilling in every way the decalogue, and the whole duty of an Englishman; but he would not have written the concluding cantos of “Childe Harold,” “Cain,” “Manfred,” or “Don Juan;” he would not have been Byron; for Sorrow and Sin trod his spirit as their wine-press, and lo! the blood-red wine of Genius, with omnipotent aroma, expressed in bitter anguish and boundless despair. “They learn in sorrow what they teach in song.” All honour to “deaneries,” and “angels” in balmorals, and clerical lawns for croquet. But volcanoes and earthquakes too are needed, or they would not *be*. “*Wrong*” we may brand the volcano, with its devastation

of human cereals, dwelling-houses, and properties in general—very wrong indeed ; still “stormy wind,” as well as gentle breeze, “fulfilleth His word.” All are not fitted for the domestic ideal, though only fools or knaves fail to feel that, when fulfilled by high human natures, it is the very noblest, as, surely with one dear woman and sweet children, it is happiest ; the obvious and true ideal of our civilized majority. But in some there remains the wild blood of the nomade, and dweller in tents of Ishmael ; these, whether they be artists or explorers, soldiers or sailors, have their true Bohemian function elsewhere, and are simply thrown away upon drawing-rooms and deaneries, however decorous. There are, too, for that matter, women who must be single, and are better so ; Aspasia here and there it may be ; students and devotees of knowledge, monks, ascetics, and such-like abnormal persons ; hero-martyrs on occasion of some ideal cause ; none of them fitted for the honourable encumbrance of a family ; yet it may easily happen that some of these will mistake their vocation, or perish in the vain attempt to reconcile vocations that prove incompatible. Let not, however, what one has called our “unlovely temple of *comfort*” be regarded as though it were the very temple of God !

But it must have been with some sense of triumphant humour that Byron (he was a wag, and this must always be borne in mind) proceeded to dispose his magician’s robe of stormful misanthropy in becoming folds around him, and, positively by flaunting it all sulphurous with the crime he had been banished for in the face of implacable society, brought this stern stepmother to his feet dissolved in repentant tears ! Now, I am far from believing that this remorseful guilt was merely invented for purposes of art ; it is so essential to the personality he generally delineates, which is substantially his own. Byron is chiefly a *lyrical* poet ; and I cannot think that he was either immaculate, or the fiend which Mrs. Stowe, and other virtuous writers

have delineated. But an artist differs from others, in that he lives a double life of experience and imagination, the first proving so much material for the second.

When a man's life is so much before us, as he evidently intended it should be, when he has deliberately put his life into his poetry, we cannot ignore it. If the editor of *Macmillan's Magazine* had not expressed himself so happy to introduce Mrs. Stowe's "strange story" to the British public, that might have been left alone ; but Dr. Elze, and even Saturday Reviewers have discussed it ; so I shall here allude to it in passing.

Byron avers that he never seduced a woman, by which I understand that he never took advantage of a young girl's innocence, deceiving her to her injury. But it is conceivable that he did not feel, any more than Shelley, precisely the same instinctive attractions and repulsions as the majority of mankind in sexual regions. Shelley deliberately defends incest, and Byron certainly does something of the same sort in "Cain." I think with Mr. Rossetti that the evidence on this head is so conflicting that we cannot condemn him. Mrs. Stowe says Lady Byron told her that he confessed and justified the crime to her. I cannot help thinking that Lady Byron unwittingly exaggerated this and many other circumstances of their unfortunate union, in talking matters over with intimate friends, and brooding over her wrongs. So admirable a man of genius, our national glory, and a noble lady of such rare excellence, with so many admirable gifts, as all who knew her agree (who but fool or knave dare deny them ?), alas ! what an irony of Fate to bring just these two together ! Ascetic purity face to face with sensuality incarnate ! If *she* "wanted one sweet weakness, to forgive," how much self-restraint, and chivalrous, affectionate service did *he* not want ? His ideas and actions were revolting to her, his very passionate impulsiveness was so ; when he broke a valuable watch out of vexation at their pecuniary embar-

rassment, this seemed to her one symptom of madness, as did his other eccentricities also ; he, because she persistently rubbed his fur the wrong way, and was so rigidly implacable, became exasperated, painted himself to her in the blackest of colours, and delighted the more to shock her. The Guiccioli allows that he confessed to an unusual warmth of manner towards his sister even in the presence of Lady Byron, which familiarity is, it will be noticed, the only *proof* Lady Byron gave to Mrs. Stowe (for the nonsense about a child, since so amply refuted, I cannot but suppose Mrs. Stowe must have misunderstood). This unusual warmth in a fiery nature like his, where the ordinary demarcations of affection and passion are not so definitely marked as in most men, is conceivable, and would perfectly explain Lady Byron's charge, especially as there were arguments between them, and he would be likely obstinately to justify himself—even accuse himself of actions he had not committed. His own heated imagination even may have magnified his offence—especially when he viewed it under the influence of Lady Byron, he himself not clearly distinguishing his strong affection from passion under the lurid horror reflected from the conscience of society. For Lady Byron evidently did possess influence over him ; he respected her greatly, and it is probable even that he drew her likeness in one of the most exquisite descriptions ever penned of a pure woman, that of Aurora Raby in “Don Juan.” He was eminently mobile and susceptible, and had there not been too much mutual repulsion in these two natures, had there been true love, she might have permanently influenced him ; but she had her own reasons for giving up the task so soon. He seems to have been often cold and cruel to her—at any rate her own instinctive aversions, and perhaps fear for her daughter, worked powerfully upon her ; but when her influence was upon him, he would feel as she did. This, and the execration of society, if only unbridled imagination had ever transgressed normal limits, would

suffice to fill him with very hell-fire of anguish and remorse, especially as he never succeeded in shaking off that orthodox creed against which he rebelled. Thus in "Manfred" we have the most absorbing love (what can be more intense than the passionate invocation of Manfred to the spirit of his sister Astarte?) steeped in self-accusing despair unutterable for the injury he may have done her, for the doom he may have brought upon her in the other life, yea, for her very love which he may have forfeited, *that human love which is his all in all!* His infinite is the finite, and on the bosom of the finite he falls with infinite yearning—a bosom that crumbles in his embrace, so that he falls, falls ever in the void! But, in sooth, the mere accusation and ban of civilized society might be sufficient to inflame Byron's imagination with the idea of such a situation; while his own morbid pleasure in self-accusations of uncommon guilt might have been almost enough originally to rivet such charges upon himself, till he at last deluded even himself into believing them. Mrs. Stowe's version of his reasons for circulating stories about the separation only among his intimates is surely very uncharitable. He might be too incontinent to suppress these altogether, and yet might, out of lingering regard for his wife, wish to imitate her *quasi-reticence*, which, after all, was a *quasi-reticence* chiefly; when he worked himself into a fury about his "wrongs," he would, indeed, say anything, but, knowing he exaggerated, with caution. He was a libertine—and such men are not as delicate as they should be—a literary libertine, who habitually made reprehensible confidences about his own most private affairs. At times, from his fear of further public ignominy if these charges became still more definite than they were, knowing what Lady Byron believed, whether truly or falsely, and had told to some persons, he might even act in the spirit of such a threat as that which he is reported to have used, alluding to "Caleb Williams," that *she* should bear all the blame of their separation. Yet, on the other

hand, he constantly affirmed that she was not to blame ; but he naturally shrank from such definite charges as would have been brought against him in a public court, knowing that it might be difficult to refute them beyond controversy. Here, as everywhere, he was made up of contradictions insufficiently harmonized : he was a child of impulse, yet could often give impulse and emotion a calculated turn. What could be more inconsistent than to poison the public mind by dark innuendoes against himself, in order to make people stare, and be "interesting," and then to rant, and rave, and lament in the most eloquent poetry when the public took him at his word ? "Self-torturing sophist" he was, like Rousseau. How he longed for love and tranquillity, and profound affection, and home, and children, and how the demons within him drove him ever out of sight of shore ! Such spiritual weakness arising from want of harmony and balance must ever produce misery. A recent writer has said that what proves him a thoroughly bad man is his abusing one mistress to another ; but these intrigues must not be judged like profound affairs of the heart ; a libertine's mistress is not likely to spare her lover after the connection is over, any more than her lover to spare her. Byron was not spared in "Glenarvon," for instance.

Byron somewhere enumerates the crimes of which rumour had accused him, wonderful to say, with a curious mixture of complacency, amusement, and yet by no means affected indignation ; among others he mentions those of Tiberius, and Heliogabalus. Assuredly some of his own expressions, taken together with certain incidents of his career, may quite as easily have exposed him to scandal and exaggerations of this nature also. A cynical, unsocial person is never very leniently regarded by his neighbours, and genius seems "something uncanny" to the million. All his friendships, he affirms, were passionate. The "Hours of Idleness" abound with passionate addresses to his friends.

“Shall fair Euryalus pass by unsung?”
 “Thy mind, in union with thy beauteous form,
 Was gentle, but unfit to stem the storm,” etc.

Of Lord Clare, who spent whole summer afternoons with him on the tomb in Harrow churchyard, he writes in 1821, “I never hear the word *Clare* without a beating of the heart even now;” and his record of their unexpected meeting on the road between Imola and Bologna that year may well be unintelligible to persons of less intense and fiery temperament. At Cambridge he was deeply attached to a young chorister, and wore a cornelian heart which the boy had given him. At Newstead, also, he felt more than usually warm friendship for the son of one of his tenants; and on his second visit to Athens we hear nothing of the “maid,” his “life,” but his heart went forth to a poor youth named Nicolo Giraud, the son of a widow; while there are some curious expressions in a letter of Shelley about his life at Venice. We can imagine what malevolent gossip might make of all this; but is there any proof that it indicates more than the extravagances of a nature far more impulsive and comprehensive in its range of emotions, than is to be met with every day? Then again, while on the one hand, he was brave and manly, much addicted to, and skilled in physical exercises, devoted to outdoor and athletic pursuits, on the other, he had a very feminine element in his character, as in his person. Hunt sneers at the rings he loved to display upon his fingers, and Ali Pacha pleased him by praising his curling hair, together with the aristocratic delicacy of his small ears and white hands. He was once taken for a woman in disguise, and in “Don Juan” he draws an attractive picture of the beautiful hero dressed as an Eastern princess. Not only women, but even men could not escape the magic of his fascination, and Lord Holland’s little son called him “the gentleman with the beautiful voice.” His countenance, like his spirit, was extra-femininely mobile, says a lady, and he could look positively

beautiful one moment, but positively ugly the next ; surely herein his face was a reflex of his soul !

I fancy the English were a little unreasonable to cry out when Countess Guiccioli took up the cudgels for Byron, just after such very damaging statements about him had been published, ostensibly on the authority of his wife. If he turned different sides of himself to the two ladies, it seems hard if both may not be shown. The Guiccioli in her old age, having married an Anglophobe marquis, writes that she found Byron a perfect angel during the six years he was with her ; and Lady Byron herself, while analyzing his character somewhat sternly and harshly to one of her friends (she even says he only feigned enthusiasm, in which case he ought to have been a great dramatist, for he feigned enthusiasm to the life) wept when she heard of his death, owning there was an angel in him. But alas ! the Guiccioli loved him, and he loved her, as well, at least, as so libertine and disillusioned a nature could love. The picture is a touching one of him at Ravenna, when she had returned with her husband to Bologna, visiting her garden and rooms at their wonted hour of meeting, reading in her favourite books, and bursting into tears before the fountain in the garden, as he reflected what evil his love might bring upon her. This lady reclaimed him from his debaucheries—as long as he lived he was faithful to her—and I think the charge against him of making no provision for her is one quite susceptible of a favourable explanation.

Byron loved two—Mary Chaworth, and the Guiccioli. Would that he could have married his first love ! In that beautiful poem, "The Dream," he confesses that her image was in his soul, even when he stood at the altar with another—*that* was the crime of his life in the sight of Heaven, and a black one, however shocking his fleshly vagaries may appear to us ; but *that* is a crime against which civilized society has no conscience. Yet an ideal marriage demands a constancy and stability of soul, of

which, alas! men like Byron and Shelley possess little, chivalrous protectiveness, generosity, magnanimity, memory of the past, faith in the future. And what if Love dies, killed by the fading of early rose-colour, intrusion of fretting trivialities, familiarity that breeds contempt, habitual failure in mutual duties, great or small, ever-increasing divergence of temperament, irritability, Love's own inanition? Even sadder than the death of an adored child is the death of Love. Yet surely Love, if he be Love, may sleep, may feign death, but cannot die. I verily believe it!

In two of Mr. Robert Browning's works, he attacks Byron with a strange fury, that seems to me far less psychologically discriminating than might have been expected from him. He pokes fun at Byron's slip of "lay" for "lie" in the deservedly celebrated passage of Childe Harold about the sea—a slip which Shelley also makes in his splendid lines on the "Apennine." We have heard a good deal about this in the newspapers, and it is all very well there; for Byron was apt to be careless and rude in diction, as well as in rhythm; but it seems a little strange for Mr. Browning (of whose genius I am a very warm admirer) to pitch into him on this score, his own language being as difficult to construe as the French of Rabelais, the German of Hegel, or Böhme. However, the *substance* of the passage is his grand object of attack. In "Hohenstiel-Schwangau" he denies apparently that Byron was a worshipper of Nature at all; in "Fifine" he argues that to exalt Nature so highly as Byron does is false philosophy. He affirms, however, that in his admiration for the sea and mountains Byron was insincere, and only meant to attract attention to himself as an admirer of the sea more than other men, using the sea merely as convenient for "hitching into a stanza." In the latter work he argues (if I rightly comprehend him) that the sea and mountains, etc., are themselves constituted by what we men please to think and feel about them. However, even on Mr.

Browning's own showing, Byron was hardly the "flatfish," and "the cackling goose" he ventures to call him. For if the sea be sublime only because a man thinks so, then, as the average tourist who crosses from Dover to Calais, even when not sick, thinks nothing of the sort, Byron, who made the sea sublime by feeling and expressing its sublimity, must be so far superior to the average man, and quite as distinguished a person as he supposed himself. In fact, however conceited, *he* would hardly have known himself in this tremendous rôle of *Creator*, which his philosophical antagonist by implication assigns to him.

But really it is news that Byron was a humbug also in this Nature-worship, of which we had all supposed him one of the principal founders and priests!—whose burning words of passionate adoration kindled one's own soul in boyhood to behold and worship; whose magnificent music, sonorous with storm and ocean and all that is free, illimitable, and enduring, thrilled the very heart of Europe, compelling it as at a god's command to bow down once more, when the angels of Faith and Hope seemed to be deserting for ever the desecrated shrines of mankind. Byron felt his own soul akin to all that was wild and stormful and immense, the moods of Nature solemnly and mysteriously responding to the moods in man. What though the soul be higher than the sea? To the sensitive and reflective spirit, the sea, the mountains, and the stars are very types and symbols of permanence, order, eternity. Nature and man are elder sister and younger brother; she wakes intelligence and will in him; he knows himself in knowing her; she is a dumb and blind elder sister, whose laws inexorably bind him, while he imposes his spirit upon her, and reads spiritual meanings in her face. Man and his own soul were a chaos to Byron; yet in heroes and good women, but above all in the order of everlasting Nature, he found again the grandeur and divinity of a Kosmos. Individual human degradation, of which we in the midst can but dimly see the issue,

receives a mystic interpretation from the unconscious innocence of a Divine Sphere, that seems evil and good, strong and weak, not individual but universal, and which is a veiled Humanity. Thence one can look up with greater trust than before even for the worms that sting one another in the dust. Why do the Arab in the desert, the Persian on his mountain, bow before the all-beholding Sun? In him is no sin, no vanity, folly, falsehood, or vain ambition; he gives life and light to all; himself the veritable incarnation of one Invisible Sun.

Surely for Byron and such as he, in the absence of revelation and philosophy, this was the best school of morality. He who loses his own personality in Nature, who lays down before her, the universal mother and tomb of humanity, his own private wrongs and griefs and fevered aspirations, hereby redresses the balance so unduly weighted with the self-will and momentary longings of one restless, passionate man. For she is one who toils not nor dreams, errs not nor supposes, raves not nor repents, but calmly fulfils herself for ever.* Mr. Browning would be impossible in those vast primeval realms where Nature still proudly asserts her dominion—where she oppresses men with creatures “burning bright in the forests of the night,” shakes them from their bubble habitations in her delirium, decimates them with the breath of pestilence and famine, overwhelms them in torrents of devastating fire!

In a time when all secrets were at length supposed to be laid bare before man's microscopic understanding, all superstitions exploded, all mysteries explained; when the universe emptied of ancient awe seemed no longer venerable, but a hideous lazar-house rather, made visible to all human eyes in every ghastly corner of it; before the Circe-wand of materialism, Love metamorphosed into a sensa-

* I have ventured here to repeat a passage in my essay on “the interpretation of Nature,” because it is peculiarly applicable to Byron and Wordsworth.

tion, and Man shrivelled to a handful of dust ; when the Body of God's own breathing world was laid with familiar irreverence upon the board of a near-sighted professor to be dissected—then the Prophet-poets, Rousseau and Byron, pointed men to the World-Soul, commanding them once more to veil their faces before the swift, subtle splendour of Life ; this they named Nature ; we may name it God !

The reaction in favour of Nature, and common humanity was indeed *commenced* in the generation preceding Byron—by the three great poets, Chatterton, Burns, and Blake ; by the genuine poets, Shenstone, Goldsmith, Gray, Thomson, and Cowper. It was developed in its distinctively modern form equally by Byron's contemporaries, Shelley, Wordsworth, Coleridge, and Keats. Still none of Byron's contemporaries filled the European *rôle* as Nature-poets that Byron filled, though the four I have named are equally eminent in this capacity, and in some respects even his superiors. Thus Byron has not, like Wordsworth, distilled for us the very essence of Nature's gentler moods ; has not listened at her very heart, and beheld all the subtle changes of her countenance in sunshine or other tranquil joy ; has not associated these with gentle women walking along life's cool, sequestered vale, and fading quietly heavenward, nor the stern, strong power of northern mountains (which this great poet equally felt) with calm, faithful, heroic men, in however humble a guise ; while there was less in Byron of the *mystical* element so hard to define, which was present with magical effect in all those I have named, and is equally present in Tennyson—though with "Manfred" and "Heaven and Earth" before me, I cannot say that in its own form it was altogether absent. But in Wordsworth, on the other hand, there is an absence of the Titanic, diabolic element ; there is a certain hardness, or obstinate dulness, a sober, cautious rationality, a serene self-complacency begotten of good inherited physical and moral constitution, together with general comfortableness of condition, that prevented

his responding fully to the mighty impulses of his time, so wise, and unwise. The people about him were contentedly orthodox, and he was as their fatherly minister: he viewed his own venerable image in the lakes, and smiled benignant; very pleasant also seemed to him the stately park of Lord Lonsdale, and he thanked Providence for all Lonsdales, and stately parks. "Strong passions mean weak will," sings Mr. Patmore; but these are axioms that, like certain toys, will stand equally well on either end. Strong will may mean weak passions—mere fluttering impulses of a student, hardly needing the rock-built citadel of virtue to withstand them; there is a real giant *strength* in a Byron, though it be ill-regulated. Nevertheless, so high-souled a poet as Wordsworth must needs break forth, ever and anon, into "a *sadder* and a wiser man;" his genius was too real not to be sorrowful, too reflective not to give its own poetic, and distinctively modern colouring to the accepted creed; while in his reconstruction of the hollow conventional poetic diction, as also in his resolute turning, with Crabbe, toward "the humble annals of the poor," he showed himself also in his measure a child of the Revolution, though his political sympathies might be conservative. But this Diabolic (not Revolutionary) element is far more pronounced in Tennyson than in Wordsworth. *His* range is a wide one, whatever poetlings, and criticasters may say; witness those haunting and terrible poems, "The Vision of Sin," "Lucretius," and "Rizpah," to say nothing of "Maud."

In Byron, again, there is less of what we feel in so much of Shelley, wherever Shelley is at his best—harmonious marriage of consummate feeling, imagery, and expression; perfect poetic music, equal to that of Shakespeare, and Milton in their highest flights. We seldom feel in Byron's as in Shelley's lyrics, the very quintessence of ethereal spiritualization, the very soul of absolutely faultless verbal melodies, rising, falling, wayward, and untameable as a fountain blown ever by the wind, subject to no law but the

law of their own lawless and superhuman loveliness. At the same time, Shelley's Protean, impalpable, superabundant splendours of imagery and diction are on the verge of vanishing into a spray of *mere* verbal effects, and sometimes his poetry unsuccessfully usurps the function of music proper. There was a certain absence in Shelley of that sustained architectonic creative faculty, which is akin to Reason; an absence which, were it not for his *transcendent* excellence in other respects, might even militate against his claim to be considered one of our country's greatest poets. There is, however, a rare transfused fragrance, a pervading air or tone, that gives a certain unity to his brilliant compositions; but in Byron's best work, it is a complex organic whole, with members of differentiated function, that emerges—no mere roods of floating prismatic substance, with every part, as in low organizations, equally fulfilling the function of every other. Yet he never gives an impression of mostly mechanical ingenuity, as does Southey; his work is nourished upon passionate rational insight. Herein he is akin to the great creators; he is clear, luminous, incisive, coherent in his descriptions; healthy vision of a sane human creature never deserts him; his strokes are few, yet sharp as those of a graving-tool, while Shelley's vision seems often blurred and confused. But it is only the general character of an object Byron gives; and where he tries to be delicate and feathery in his touches, like Wordsworth, Keats, or Shelley, he frequently becomes merely tame and conventional. Moreover, in justice to Wordsworth, it must be allowed that there are tedious lengths of somewhat commonplace verse even in the early tales, as likewise in the early parts of Childe Harold—plenty of them assuredly in the dramas.

In seeking for a *note* of this peculiar modern Nature-worship, I think we must set down as a principal one, *Pantheism*, either overt or implicit. For it is a *worship*—precisely as the Scandinavian and Greek Mythologies are

worships—only in a modern form ; and there was less of this in Spenser, Shakespeare, the Fletchers, Browne, Drayton, or Milton, although in these poets delight in external nature was most fresh and genuine. But no less in Byron, Wordsworth, and Coleridge than in Shelley, there was *worship* of the creature ; though in Byron, because he had less metaphysical grasp of thought, in Wordsworth because by conviction he was a theist, the Pantheism was implicit ; while in Shelley, as in Goethe, it was overt. In Tennyson, a theist, it is again implicit. Goldsmith, and his generation, have not more of it than Chaucer. The fifth great nature-worshipper, Keats, is so far not pantheistic, because he is to all intents and purposes a polytheistic Greek myth-maker, born out of due time. He personified Nature—as, indeed, to a large extent did Spenser, and the other Elizabethans, and Chatterton ; where he does not, he endows her with animation akin to the human, which again reveals in him implicit pantheism. But Goldsmith (like the lesser Georgian poets, Rogers, Milman, etc.) regards the external world as the creation of a personal God, simply recording what he sees, and the pleasure it gives him, together with its remoter associations ; always putting Nature well outside himself, humanity, and God, as something just created to be perceived, and give us emotions—or food and raiment.

Byron's tales are delightfully steeped in a sunny Eastern atmosphere—though, perhaps, they are hardly equal in this respect to the few wonderful lines depicting Eastern travel in his own "Dream," to Eöthen, or Beckford's "Vathek." Byron's later story, "The Island," is, however, deliciously suffused with the tropical glow, though the versification and diction of it are in his most curiously careless, and objectionable manner.

Like the best lyrics of Heine, Burns, and Scott, Byron's are more alive with warm humanity, go more to the heart of mankind, than those lovely dissolving phantasmal ones of Shelley ; though it is to be admitted that there is a vein

of coarse earthliness and commonness about Byron that makes many of his lyrics poor and wooden, as Shelley's never are. But his best are rich with a masculine sorrow, often graceful, and tenderly musical in the highest degree. One need name only "Bright be the place of thy soul," "When we two Parted," "The Wild Gazelle," the poems to his sister, and Thyrsa. Yet the most original and distinguished of Byron's lyrical work is certainly that in which his manifold wrath, his passion for wild life, and his ardour for human freedom, are embodied. How glorious the "Isles of Greece," how fine "Sennacherib," and "The Song of Saul;" how powerful the "Ode on Bonaparte," and the "Ode from the French!" The most concentrated venom of hate is distilled into the lyric, "When the Moon is on the Wave," in "Manfred." But his odes, on the whole, are not equal to Shelley's, whose passion for human liberty was quite as ardent, and more spiritual than Byron's; purified by his longing for a reign of Love and Peace; so that he breaks ever and anon into heavenly seraphic strains, as in "Hellas," and "Prometheus," borne aloft upon the strong wings of varied lyrical measures that never fail him. Shelley's fury of indignation in face of armed oppression is at white-heat and tremendous; but there is a want of steadfast distinctness of thought, and aim, and feeling, even here. Byron may droop his pinion and flounder; but he never lacks this manful grasp of his theme; rejoicing, moreover, like Antæus, in the touch of his mother earth, in the coarse common human effort, and mixed stormy strife by which deliverance and the age of gold must be fought for sternly, inch by inch. Hence, men in general will always feel his poetry more germane to them and to the real world. Shelley, the Peri, like his own skylark, sings to us from the sky.

The finest of the "Tales," to my mind (it belongs to his later period), is "The Prisoner of Chillon;" that is in perfect harmony, and unutterably beautiful, with its

solemn organ-peal of the "Sonnet to Liberty" as overture. There is all Scott's unity of effect here, and more than his aroma of poetry indefinable. For Scott, it should be remembered, deliberately gave up the field of verse-poetry to his younger rival; he felt, and felt rightly, that they had much in common as poets, but that there was a *je ne sais quoi* about Byron's metrical work that made it for the most part rarer and higher in quality; they were both romantic poets, delighting in themes of love, and strife, and pageantry—with the supernatural, mysterious element toning down the brilliancy of their work here and there. Scott had more of the plot-constructing faculty than Byron, and far more dramatic power: accordingly, he became the greatest writer of prose fiction in the English language. For I cannot think (with all our abundant talent in this region) that, regarding him as a *spontaneous creative poet*, in the wider sense of that word, any English man or woman has ever rivalled him—except the man who surpasses all, Shakespeare—though Dickens and Charlotte Brontë have their own place apart, and Thackeray runs Scott very near. In the "Bride of Lammermoor," by the way, Scott has achieved, I think, a finer work of art than Byron himself, in Byron's own literary vein. Moreover, Scott's feeling of the supernatural in Nature comes out especially in his novels, notably in the "Monastery." This is very real and magical, and quite the feeling of mediæval romance, allowing for the difference of intellectual belief; but all that was in his blood, and the traditions upon which he had been nourished. It is quite *akin* to Pagan Polytheism, and is just the Nature-worship that could not be expelled altogether by the crude carpenter-theory, which the established religion had made orthodox. The old gods might be devils and witches, as had been decreed; but, anyhow, they would not be expelled altogether; there they were mysteriously animating or inhabiting certain elements of Nature. The clouds were full of angels or

demons, the white light was God's throne, while fairies peopled the woods and streams. This feeling of physical elements as a *habitat* for spiritual beings is always associated with an instinctive fancy (or rather intuition) that they are a *naturally fit* habitation for them ; such spirits are virtually the souls corresponding to the bodies of these elements, the ideas, or spiritual essences of them personified—a conception justified even by Science, when she teaches that man is a final cause and consummation, a more perfectly developed truth, as it were, implicit in physical agencies ; this Humanity repeating in a higher sphere the life of Nature, which is under one aspect that higher life in the forming, and repeating more emphatically in some personalities than in others the special type of certain physical agencies—flowing stream in one man, stolid mountain in another. But the Polytheistic feeling that these agencies are distinct though living powers, in communion with man, and influencing him, seems more essentially true. Thus in Dante's colossal poem, all the material imagery is informed with spiritual significance ; it is the elaborate embodiment of great moral and spiritual ideas ; and Dante evidently looked with his earnest eyes upon the visible universe as God's grand symbol ; though, of course, his creed was Catholic and Theistic.

In "Childe Harold" there are passages which must hold their own for ever in the ranks of English poetry :—

"Once more upon the waters ! yet once more !
 And the waves bound beneath me as a steed
 That knows his rider ! Welcome to their roar !
 Swift be their guidance wheresoe'er they lead !
 Though the strained mast should quiver as a reed,
 And the rent canvas fluttering strew the gale,
 Still must I on, for I am as a weed
 Flung from the rock on ocean's foam to sail,
 Where'er the surge may sweep, the tempest's breath prevail !"

The exquisite lines that refer to Waterloo can hardly be forgotten, nor those sweet, peaceful ones about Lake

Leman, that breathe the twin influence of Leman and of Shelley, nor the magnificent reverberation in clanging words of an Alpine thunderstorm :—

“ Lausanne ! and Ferney ! ye have been the abodes
Of names which unto you bequeathed a name ! ”

Ay, and what of Rousseau's Clarens ; of Geneva, the city of Calvin, that other great Genevese reformer, and now of De Staël's Coppet and Byron's Diodati ? These all, with Bonnivard, are a felt presence by Leman—consecrating her shores and her waters. I went to Diodati lately. It was deserted, and we wandered through the rooms and about the garden where Byron and Shelley had sat conversing—where Milton too had set his foot in days gone by ! When Byron returned to Diodati, after sitting late into the night with Shelley on the opposite shore, the Shelleys from their chamber used to hear his rich voice singing across the water in his boat. Like Julie and St. Preux, he and Shelley were once nearly wrecked in a boat off Meillerie. This was the period at which one loves to think of the two poets together, and afterwards at Venice, when they rode daily on the Lido. The fourth Canto, however, is grandest of all, has some of the finest descriptive poetry in our language. It opens worthily with Venice in her sad glory. How splendidly is the poet Tasso contrasted with his princely oppressor, Alphonso of Ferrara ! How the thunder and lightning of Terni's Cataract have passed into the shouting stanzas ! All the noble verses concerning Rome and her departed glories, her ruins and her triumphs of art, are worthy of the great subject. But what misery !—

“ For all are meteors with a different name ;
And Death the sable smoke where vanishes the flame ! ”

With that “ Marah of misanthropy and despair within,” whom couldst thou trust, who could trust thee ? Not even God to trust in, or the Divine All, which is self-reconciled,

and of which thou wast one Age's world-agonizing Spirit! After a stately and most pathetic lamentation over Princess Charlotte, there grow upon the soul and resound those ocean murmurs, which are the conclusion and crowning poetry of a poem that will be forgotten only with its native tongue. Vanishes here the "Pilgrim of Eternity":—

“ Βῆ δάκεών παρὰ θινὰ πολυλοίσβοιο θαλασσης.”

But since Byron, let us remember that the Age is awakening to new life—"The age of ruins is past." It is full of Devil and Mammon worship, death, agony, and vulgar fever; but he is no great poet who daintily hides himself from it in the study or the studio. The people are awake; each must enter into the life of the rude giant; he only who does so dare pretend to see beyond. There are great wars, and national movements, wonderful inventions, terrible conflict of principles; the world is recreated at the breath of science; our explorers visit all countries, and Columbus-like discover new continents: "Pioneers! O Pioneers!"

Byron, in "Don Juan" especially, has shown a boundless creative imagination of the *realistic* order. Where men and women of a certain type are concerned—and that type is by no means so limited as Macaulay and some other critics have maintained—where the grander elements of Nature are in question, as also, in the evocation of high thoughts and feelings of a definite range in connection with these, he is first-rate, as frequently in tenderness. But for the creation of ideal worlds and their denizens, governed by lofty, reflective, imaginative purpose, and requiring sustained flights in high spiritual atmospheres, we must turn to Dante, Milton, or Shakespeare. In Byron fine typical personifications are rare, such as we find in Spenser, or Chatterton—Byron's "War," in "Childe Harold," being adapted from a finer personification in the "Marvellous Boy." Yet the strangely beautiful "dramatic mystery," "Heaven and Earth," might

almost be excepted from this criticism, for here the gloom of coming Deluge and its deepening terrors are palpably, yet with appropriate indistinctness of visionary imagery, rolled around mystic loves of "woman wailing for her demon lover." Here there is much of the fine sweep of a great *idealistic* artist's brush: still even this required imagination of a far less idealistic order than the construction of a Pandemonium, a Hell, or a Purgatory. Bring that sea, and those mountains, which the poet knew so well, together—the great spectacular phenomena of mountain, cloud, and ocean—and there looms the Deluge. Byron's wonted range of subject and treatment is hardly here self-surpassed. His personages, even his immortals, are still embodiments of the same feelings, thoughts, and desires. Yet the dim outlines of those exulting demons in the twilight; those angel-forms, and the women who call them, Aholibamah, and tender Anah; the good men, Japhet and Noah; Raphael appearing to summon the new rebel angels to their duty; the welter of common mortals struggling with doom—all this forms a magnificent lurid picture of a "world before the flood," that is almost worthy of our loftier spiritual masters. Still there is little here of sustained imaginative incarnation, and realization of spiritual things, with wizard flashings of weird, yet appropriate detail, helping to impress the Dædal individualities sprung from the brain of their creator upon us. The Melancholia of Dürer, Sin and Death, Caliban, those apocalyptic souls in the Doom-circles of the Florentine, the regions wherein they dwell awfully aware with populous imagery, whereunto they appear as native—think of these! and again of fantastic dream-worlds, self-involved and subtly infinite like the rose—"Midsummer Night's Dream," "The Tempest," Shelley's "Prometheus," visions of Calderon, Keats, and Coleridge. Nevertheless, there is a harmonious lyrical atmosphere pervading this grand shadowy creation, which sets it by itself as a great ideal work of a master, who is perhaps

greatest as a realistic poet. There is also one magnificent verse in the "Vision of Judgment" describing Satan, which, if it were not somewhat a reminiscence of Milton, one might pronounce Miltonic.

But although I hold with Shelley, Goethe, Scott, and Wilson, that "Cain" is one of the finest poems in our language, the early portion of the poem, wherein Byron may be said to enter into direct competition with Milton, is surely a failure. There is no soul-overwhelming grandeur at all in those queer regions of space to which he conducts Lucifer and Cain, while the verse halts terribly. In the long discourse of Lucifer with Cain we discern little difference between them, while we do painfully feel here, as elsewhere in Byron where thought is wanted, that if Byron had been a thinker like Dante, or Milton, or Goethe, he might have sat beside the three greatest poets of Europe—Homer, Dante, and Shakespeare; but the lucubrations of Cain and Lucifer lack vigour and point, as those of Faust and Mephistopheles never do. It is in the human element, however, that Cain is so magnificent, as a *great dramatic picture*. And I cannot but think that though Byron is not a great dramatist, he is a great dramatic painter. I believe it is Wilson who says, that his groups and personages are as statuesque bronzes cast in the fire. It is to be recollected that Goethe, who ought to be an authority, most highly praised his dramas. Certainly he has not the wonderful skill in dramatic dialogue of Landor; nor in dramatic monologue of Mr. Browning. But where Byron is effective in drama, it is by lyrically pouring the quintessence of his characters into the mould of one supreme situation, capable of realizing them with the utmost intensity. This seems to be somewhat true of Hugo also, though Hugo has more plot-constructing faculty—arranges and dovetails his incidents with all the skill of Calderon—and heightens his effects by varying, as it were, and multiplying with tremendous prodigality of power such great effective situations.

But there is little Shakespearian development of character in Byron, yet I should maintain, as against the ordinary criticism, that Byron can realize characters of a type opposite to that one type most congenial to his genius, sufficiently to present these as truly and vitally influencing one another, especially in certain supreme scenes or situations. That is not so in "Manfred," which is a mere monologue; but it is so in "Cain," "Marino Faliero," and "Sardanapalus." From the third act onward, Cain becomes and continues magnificent—from where Cain mutters forebodings over little Enoch, his own and his sister Adah's child, while she gently remonstrates, to where Cain is contrasted with Abel, as the spirit of revolt and denial with that of tranquil faith, rising to utmost heights of moral dignity and wrath, where Abel confronts the blasphemer who would overthrow the chosen altar of Jehovah, his own proud offering lying unaccepted, his own altar smitten to the dust. There is nothing in English poetry finer for tragic intensity and pathos, than the supreme scene where Cain strikes his brother dead with a brand snatched from the altar, then bows in horrified remorse over the corpse—he who so sullenly arraigned the fated Doom, fated through his own passions, half-righteous and half-evil, to bring himself that dreaded Doom into the world; Eve, the mother of all, cursing with terrific energy her own eldest-born, slayer of her well-beloved son; gentle Zillah, Abel's wife, lamenting over him; and Adah, one of the most perfect types of holy womanhood in literature—Adah, when the dark smitten murderer bids her leave him alone, only answering with troubled wonder, "Why, all have left thee!" Then Cain, the brand upon his brow, wanders forth with Adah into the wilderness, she leading their little Enoch by the hand, kissing Abel's cold clay, and praying "Peace be with him!" to which Cain in the last words of this great poem responds, "But with *me!*" Byron's Cain is by no means a very wicked man; he is surprised as it

were into the murder, and, as matters are here represented, we feel that he did well to be angry. He with becoming dignity makes an offering appropriate to him, according to his light, which he may well hope that the all-seeing, just God will accept; he is throughout half-doubtful about his God, half-defiant of what seems to himself evil in that God. His very objection to the sacrifice of innocent animals proves him to be humane, and a foe to all cruel oppression, as also his abhorrence of human vengeance, even in Deity, if it were true that Deity needed to be propitiated by bloody sacrifice. Need Christians any longer think this poem very blasphemous? That there are "*no ideas*" in Byron, moreover, Mr. Arnold in the face of this poem should scarcely maintain; and Goethe goes a little too far when he says, "He is a child when he begins to reflect." I conceive "Cain" to be the philosophico-imaginative consummation to which the "Tales," "Manfred," and "Childe Harold" tended. Together with "Manfred," moreover, it proves Mr. Browning's objection as to Byron's unduly exalting Nature over men, a somewhat unfortunate one. If you must judge a poet as you would a didactic philosopher, I should say that Byron's error is, on the contrary, in unduly exalting the individual human spirit; in a lack of humility and resignation. Cain, like Faust, is insatiably curious, and chafes against the limitations of human knowledge; yet he represents a faithless, desultory time, which ours still is, moreover; for in this region of the intellect, he rather seems angry at not knowing without being at the trouble of learning; he takes no laborious pains reverently to seek truth. In that, too, Byronism represents an age of rather shallow scepticism, that sneers and sighs over the insolubility of problems, which it is too weak and idle manfully to grasp—but with a doom overshadowing himself, his beloved ones, and all mankind, which seems to him unintelligible and unjust, he refuses to be meekly happy and content, even though he loves Adah and his child. He

is the genius of speculative yearning, oppressed and overcharged with evil within, the curse of hereditary sin; morbidly sensitive to evil without; overclouding all past, present, and prospective good with the gloom of his own sullen frown, out of which must inevitably spring the lightning of his crime; even by the side of his own true wife and his own sweet boy, *alone!* In a fine sonorous invective Lucifer avers that God Himself, however powerful, must be most miserable of all—for He is the most *alone*. Could He but annihilate Himself and all; but alas for His and our *immortality!* Of such a God—proud, capricious, revengeful, apart—had Byron heard from accredited teachers. Cain finds too that “the *tree of knowledge is not that of life.*” Byron’s is the wail of baffled human understanding, without faith, hope, resignation, self-control, inward harmony. But if in “Cain” he defies heaven, in “Manfred” he defies hell, and denies the power of any evil spirits over him, asserting proudly, and with truly sublime daring, his own spiritual independence and dignity. He is a Pagan, not a Christian, though with some genuine Christian sympathies, and a Hebrew creed still hanging about him. But he never holds up self-sacrifice, humility, or patience; is always haughty and aggressive; he endures, indeed, but somewhat less than a Pagan—he more actively despairs and rebels.

Christianity has taught him discontent with this life, but he cannot accept the solutions of her theologians; so with tenfold more bitterness than Atrides exclaiming to Zeus, when his sword broke in his hand, “There is no God more evil-minded than thou”—than the Neapolitan fisherman beating the image of his Saint, who sends storms instead of fine weather—Byron defies and rails against his Deity. But of course *he* had only a lingering notion that the popular representation might be true, and that there was really a Creator, who, having created immortal spirits, tyrannically forbids them, as Lucifer finely phrases it, “to

use their immortality," their reason, their conscience, and their heart. It is against this God, formed in the image of priests and kings, that Lucifer and Cain rebel, rather than against the true Author and Essence of Things. Of this true Author and Essence of Things Byron had unfortunately, from the circumstances of his time, and his own want of philosophic grasp, very little idea; yet he believed in a God; and very naturally, however irrationally, confounded the true God with the current orthodox conception of Him, against which he inveighed—if vaguely, still with enlightened soul, knowing that God was by theology caricatured, and that the vulgar conception was monstrous, and to be fought against. But after all, this was a *dominant* conception, one that had always been dominant more or less; the force of education, authority, universal conviction, practically moulding all the relations of society, together with the poet's own ineffectual habit of thought, forced the idea on him as a kind of reality; but his better, yet audacious self, dared to wrestle with it, even on this basis of its dubious reality; so Job ventures to argue with the Lord. In fact, a half-truth this belief must be, and for long it has been to mankind as a whole truth; "the times of this ignorance God winked at;" but the idea of Him must be slowly purified. Acquiescence in evil is not altogether desirable, and to pronounce evil good, because divinely appointed, may be to fetter ourselves, the human race, and its destiny of progress. The established fact, the conventional morality, the existing order of society—none of these are final. Good at one time, they may become evil at another. Then God is no longer in them, but rather in rebellion against them. There might even be an evil Demiurgus, God of this world, as some Gnostics believed; if so, Byron will not worship *him*. Byron holds the human spirit, or at least the *elect* human spirit, with its eternal reason and sense of justice, essentially equal to any gods or devils whatsoever, however

powerful these may be. And here he is right. A God who should gag and degrade our reason and conscience by mere externally imposed authority cannot be the true, or the fully revealed God. He is within—the substantial reason and conscience of Humanity—most manifest in Christ, the Human God, the Divine Man. So is brought to light a higher eternal self in conscious solidarity with the Divine universal will. Both Manfred and Cain hurl defiance at the very skies. What makes Cain sound blasphemous is that Cain believes in Jehovah, yet defies him; this is precisely as Shelley's Prometheus defies Zeus; but we have been brought up to call this apparent wrong of theology right, because we are assured that it is divinely revealed, whereas we should have asked ourselves, *how can doctrines be revealed unless by an anti-Christ or usurping God, if they are irrational or immoral?* Lucifer and Cain, like Prometheus, are champions of human liberty. The ultimate arbiter, Fate, will dethrone the unjust Zeus in the end. To this true God they virtually appeal, and they cannot be disappointed; or in other words, they really appeal from God in His partial, to God in His fuller revelation of Himself, which He is indeed making through themselves. Yet their shallow presumption and irreverence He disapproves and punishes; still it is He, the incarnate World-Spirit, striving in them to free Himself, though he justifies also the humble, holy Abels. If the evil cannot be destroyed, it can be chained down; the good, and just, and rational is lord over the evil and inane; that is a slave, a drudge, essential indeed, yet subordinate and to be subordinated. One can indeed only sympathize *partly* with this revolt; it is *in part* directed against the very nature of things, against the true Sovereign God, who must be beyond our right and wrong—right in a manner and degree to which our rectitude cannot attain. Neither Byron nor Shelley were possessed with that *awe* which becomes a mortal before the unfathomable mystery. Even in his beloved storms Byron felt little

spiritual awe, was chiefly "sharer in their fierce and far delight," or recklessly contemptuous of humanity's weakness. Cain's sullen hatred of effort and labour, his want of patient faith, his obstinate self-will, his ignorance of how to conquer Fate by calmly accepting it, or circumventing it by fertility of resource, this is truly evil and folly, and miserable weakness; such, for instance, are some recent insane developments of anarchic irreligion. Like the later pessimists, Leopardi and Schopenhauer, Byron cannot see that the higher blessedness may be—so far as we know can only be—born out of sorrow and pain, even out of experience of moral evil.

Macaulay says Byron can only paint one man, and one woman—a gross exaggeration; for Don Juan, and Sardanapalus are so different from Cain that they cannot be confounded; and as to women, it is mere confusion of thought to confound Adah, Angiolina, Zarina, Donna Julia, Haidee, Gulnare, and Myrrha, wonderfully realized, and thoroughly feminine types all of them. Gulnare is the passionate, fierce beautiful southern woman, of which type Byron has given us many brilliant portraitures. Haidee is a loving, passionate girl, but a thoroughly innocent, albeit fiery-natured one—she might indeed become Gulnare, but she *is* something totally distinct. Adah is not to be surpassed for heavenly, yet human, tender, unsullied perfection of womanliness—a perfect sister, mother, wife; she is not surpassed in Shakespeare, Victor Hugo, George Sand, Walter Scott; even the Marguerite of Goethe is only equal to her. Then we have Zarina in "Sardanapalus," Angiolina in "Marino Faliero," skilfully painted women of a totally different order—noble women too—both evidently intended for idealized portraitures of Lady Byron—self-possessed, stately, somewhat cold, yet excellent and affectionate. In "Don Juan," how marvellously good is Donna Julia—and her letter, how immortally inimitable! We have again Lady Adelaide Amundeville, a very clever sketch of an English lady of

fashion, and the sweet seraphic Aurora Raby, a sort of English Adah.

“Aurora Raby, a young star who shone
O'er life, too sweet an image for such glass,
A lovely being scarcely formed or moulded,
A rose with all its sweetest leaves yet folded.
She gazed upon a world she scarcely knew,
As seeking not to know it ; silent, lone,
As grows a flower, thus quietly she grew,
And kept her heart secure within its zone.
There was awe in the homage which she drew ;
Her spirit seemed as seated on a throne
Apart from the surrounding world, and strong
In its own strength.”

Myrrha in “Sardanapalus” is a heroine of the antique type, beautiful and splendid-souled, rousing the luxurious monarch to lofty action.

If Byron had possessed the instincts of a great dramatist (but remember he was still young, and developing when he died), he could never have surrendered himself to the bondage of the so-called “unities.” Yet on the whole he may instinctively have felt that these laws furnished him with certain artificial restraints, helpful to his desultory though intense genius ; serving as a kind of blowpipe to concentrate its flame upon one supreme moment. It is indeed difficult to deliver a verdict on the dramas. For “Sardanapalus” is a very fine play, and “Marino Faliero” shows real dramatic power, yet is scarcely a good drama ; while the “Two Foscari” is dull and wooden, and “Werner” a mere plagiarism. The blank verse of Byron’s dramas is probably the worst ever written by a great poet ; the lines end in the awkwardest of monosyllabic parts of speech, “ands” “ofs,” etc. There is no harmonious flexibility and resonance in the metre at all ; and there is a quantity of tedious prose cut up into lengths. His ear was indeed most uncertain. The motive in “Marino Faliero” strikes one as inadequate to support the play’s action, as Byron has represented that motive ; he has not skilfully made us feel the mixed half-

unconscious influences that probably prompted the old Doge. Yet the fiery old man is finely drawn, and the scene where he reveals himself to the conspirators in their midnight meeting is full of stormy power, and thoroughly true to nature, the conflict of feelings in the Doge as an aristocrat in such a position being subtly realized. Here again Byron draws from within. The concluding scene (the execution) is eminently *picturesque*. But "Sardanapalus" is certainly a very fine play—a great dramatic success, though it is, perhaps, hardly equal to Otway, "The Cenci," Sheridan, or to a great English play of recent times, Sir Henry Taylor's "Philip van Artevelde." In "Sardanapalus" however, we behold (so far as the "unities" allow) the march of tragic historic events, and these have a palpable influence in developing the character of a luxurious, effeminate, yet amiable, generous, and ultimately heroic monarch. Myrrha, moreover, the grand Greek maiden, together with Salemenes, the stern, honest warrior, who, though but a sketch, is lifelike and well-realized, have a noble influence upon the king, who can appreciate their elevated characters. There is a weak side to the play, no doubt, as Bishop Heber pointed out—in the group of Arbaces, and Beleses the priest, who are not dramatically represented in their mutual relations with one another. Admirable, however, is the scene wherein Sardanapalus surprised feasting in his summer pavilion by those rebels, whom with indolent good-nature he has half-pardoned, starts forth, worthy of his ancestors, an avenging warrior, though too late; calling, in his vanity, for a mirror while arming, and for his most bejewelled helmet, as lighter, more becoming to his delicate beauty, and also more conspicuous to friends and foes, even though it expose him to a death which he half-recklessly courts. Excellent too are the battle scenes, full of lusty movement and all the din of onset. Nowhere has Byron so fully dramatized himself as here, I suspect, though the gloomy phase of his

character is suppressed ; but the hero is a half-sceptical epicurean, masculine and brave, yet with many a feminine trait.

Whatever our verdict on Byron as dramatist, it remains to be remarked that he was one of the greatest satirists England has produced—three only (if so many) can be elevated to stand beside him—Swift, Pope, and Butler. Thackeray can hardly be placed so high, nor Dryden—though as wit he has no doubt other rivals, and as a humorist he is surpassed by Shakespeare and Dickens. But in scathing, savage, half-playful banter—playful as a tiger—in masterful, annihilating strokes of witty indignation—he has again a song, as Goethe says, “all his own”—in spite of Pulci and Whistlecraft ; he is Apollo discharging his arrows at the Python, Michael with his proud foot upon the body of Satan. The scornful wit of the “Vision of Judgment” is Titanic—as where “Turncoat Southey” offers to Satan to write his life, and Satan declining with a bow, Southey glibly appeals to Michael the Archangel with the same tempting offer. Here is George III.—“*and amidst them an old man with an old soul, and both extremely blind.*” Then what terrific lines those are on the Prince Regent, on occasion of his presence at the opening of the coffins of Charles I. and Henry VIII. !

But I admit that “Don Juan” is on the whole Byron’s greatest work. Byron had a good deal of the eighteenth century, and also of the Restoration period about him, after all. The era of the Regency was, for scoffing profligacy, not at all unlike that of the Restoration, and the congenial literary influence on him, not only of Pope, Dryden, and their bitter personal animosities, but of licentious Restoration dramatists, and of light, cynical men, such as Rochefoucauld, Grammont, and Horace Walpole, is very palpable. He was moulded also by English writers like Smollett and Fielding ; certain libertine French novels too reappear in his works. Yet I own “Don Juan” seems to

me morality itself compared to a rotten whited sepulchre of a book like "Chesterfield's Letters." Still the immoral laxity of tone is not to be denied. If Byron had not led the dissipated life he did, and moved for some time in "good society" also, he could certainly not have written this "man of the world's" poem, which is that, though something more. But whatever advantage he and Moore may have derived from "knowing life," it was not a moral one, and there is an odour by no means of sanctity, a rather sulphurous odour indeed, a certain conventional humbug and hollowness and disbelief in good, that clings both to the man and to his writings, simply because, while he spurned the whole lot of enamelled corpses as poet, free-man, and idealist, yet as aristocrat and man of fashion he was half one of them, and even looked up with envy to creatures like Beau Brummell, and "the first gentleman in Europe." This taint has made Byron distasteful to some who should have taken a more comprehensive view; but assuredly Byron has not quite shaken off the polite ceremonies he spurns. In Burns and Shelley you breathe a purer atmosphere. Shelley is a sort of volatile seraph; Burns is inconstant, but ever a true passionate *man*, as Walter Scott is also. If Byron's head was of gold, his feet were of clay.

For all this, "Don Juan" is one of the world's great poems. Byron himself claimed that he had therein produced a true epic; and I have always thought with some reason. Is it not the epic of that transition period in Europe? The poem reflects faithfully that age's varying moods, grave and gay, moods of stirring strife and battle, of enterprize and revelry—its appetite for pleasure, its cynical, epicurean scepticism, denial, and mockery—together with the opposite mood of sentiment, pathos, bitter despair, as well as nature-worship—reverence for feudalism, refinement, and tradition—revolt in favour of simplicity, plain goodness, and common humanity. It revels in war, yet

inveighs against the tyranny and barbarism thereof; it reverences the ideal, yet refuses to behold it in life—chiefly on account of its own wanton perverseness, and half *blasé*, half childish irreverence of soul. Even in the poem's very want of artistic proportion, of beginning, middle, or ending proper, in its daring originality of form, metre, and language, it is faithful to the spirit of the time. For Auerbach justly remarks that World-Sorrow, and we should add Negation, or Heine's "Weltsvernichtung," cannot produce the perfect work of art. Byron in fact never did. But Don Juan was a well-known modern European Type, of which Byron made his own use: the poet had pitched at last upon the very subject and very manner perfectly adapted to develop his transcendent powers:—

"I rattle on exactly as I'd talk
With anybody in a ride or walk."

He needed not here to be always up on the heroic stilts, whether raised aloft by his theme or no; and in his graver work the small critics often caught him getting off the high horse in those inevitable intervals of flight when Pegasus desires to crop the earthly grass. And then they assembled shouting that this was a poet with a "bad ear," a careless, uncertain poet, with inadequate powers of expression; for in moments of less lofty emotion a first-rate poet, they tell us, should make mouths and beat the air, and say *pudding*, *prunes*, and *prism*, and many "blessed words" like "*Mesopotamia*," to make the vulgar believe that he is always at the boiling-point of inspiration. If he cannot be ever moving, he can at least blow the steam off ostentatiously when he stops. But what perfect English is "Don Juan!"—it has always the right word ready. Alas! how few poets write English now! In "Don Juan" the measure and language seem to shape themselves out of the sense and intent of the narrative; here the style is to the matter what the foam and impetus and tumult are to the wave. "Don

Juan" is diffuse ; its egotistic, half-chaffy gossip is often empty enough, occasionally even a little tiresome ; but we have always to admire its facile masterfulness of rhyme and metre, while it is always relieved by endless versatility of matter, and changeableness of mood. Cynical it is certainly, and world-weary ; but half its paradox is chaff. There is a vein of rollicking buffoonery through the whole, which by ponderous moralists is always missed. " I rattle on exactly as I'd talk "—just so, and we know the half-grave, half-gay nonsense Byron talked. The man was half an Aristophanes, half a Rabelais. His buffoonery at Newstead with the monk's skull for drinking cup, and monk's robes of sack-cloth—his dressing up the statues of Neville's Court at Trinity with surplices—his popping with his pistol at those stone ornaments on the house-roof opposite his own at Missolonghi, till all the old women came howling out to remonstrate with this eccentric Milordo, who had arrived to deliver Greece, and leave his weary life in their fever jungles—his hilarious practical jokes—all showed the grown-up schoolboy.

If you weep too much over this man, fair ladies and sad young gentlemen, even though he bid you weep, he will look up laughing in your faces, and overwhelm you with mockery : you must not take all he sings for gospel ; in the very heart of this there is a hollowness and a jeer ; and surely he who has laid his hand upon the very heart of God's universe must be, like Byron, both a weeping, and a laughing philosopher ! Writers have become indeed more radically miserable since Byron. I can hear no merriment in the ghastly "Contes Drolatiques" of Balzac, none in the hollow spectral mockery of Heine, none in the despair of Leopardi. After all, Byron is no hysteric young Frenchman to be manipulated by a mistress, and shoot himself ! His intellectual and emotional range is vast ; he can thunder and rave and laugh like the sea. For the rest, as he says himself, if he laughs, it is often that he may not weep.

And there is indeed much of bitterness and disappointment in his hilarity ; he is still misanthropic, and incredulous of human excellence ; but he will try now to disburthen himself of his sorrow by a jest or an epigram. Reckless dissipation, and carnal excesses, may have dimmed his ideal, and he comes before us more as a *roué* man of the world, or light-hearted sceptic ; but after all he cannot always keep the mask on, and when he removes it we behold a great and true man in tears—"Childe Harold" himself, but less egotistic in his thoughts and aims and interests, less inclined to "pose," with maturer digested knowledge of men and things than before ; on one side of his face, indeed, a hoary, world-weary sinner, but on the other a still generous, adventurous, high-spirited boy. Nowhere in Byron can I, for my part, discern, the "fiend gloating triumphantly over human frailties," which some profess to see. Rousseau, let alone the Bible, would have taught him better than that, and did teach him better.

In clear, graphic, realistic narrative power, as well as in humour, Byron in "Don Juan" reminds one of Chaucer and Boccaccio, while his descriptions of human loveliness have all the luscious, luminous colouring of Ovid, or Correggio ; nay, there never were, and never will be such descriptions. The harem scenes are in this respect unrivalled. Is there anything quite equal to that lovely idyl of Haidee and Juan's love after the shipwreck on the beautiful island ? Such incidents as those of the shipwreck, the siege of Ismail, and the intrigue with Donna Julia, have all the *verve* and narrative power of Homer, all his direct reality and breathing life ; though there is not here, as in the Iliad, one great action dominating all the incidents. But there are certainly traces of development and change in the charming dandy—events and persons are transforming him slowly into the man of the world, though the bloom of generous youth is still on him ; he is consummately lifelike. Granted that type of character, mobile, eager, super-

ficial, events and persons would have just the kind, and amount of influence they have over him.* Here, moreover, there is no longer any question of delineating a proud, morose, melancholy genius : all men, if not all women, can sympathize with this hero ; he is one of themselves, idealized indeed, but only with the more ordinary popular qualities furbished up and augmented ; commonplace, not more than usually intellectual, emotional, or imaginative. This is one of the notable merits of the poem, as a work of art. What though Byron found this petted, spoiled personage in himself? Yet no other qualities of his own very heterogeneous personalty, none of those he is accused of being able alone to represent, has he attributed to this pleasant, handsome boy. He never makes Juan moralise, or mock, or moan ; though he drops him occasionally, and does that himself. The fact is, that genius *must always be*, in some mysterious manner, whatever it represents to the life. Goethe only makes his women, and one or two types of man *live* ; the rest he skilfully *imitates*. Shakespeare, on the other hand, was an intellectual and moral miracle. He *lives* in innumerable human types. But we cannot pause to speak of the inexhaustible wit, the pointed epigrams, the scathing scorn, the numerous pithy couplets such as this, in the cantos about English society :—

“ There was the Honourable Mrs. Sleep,
Who seemed a white lamb, and was a black sheep.”

In our intellectual, competitive-examination, tradesman-like, priggish age, it is perhaps possible a little to underrate this Alcibiades kind of hero—natural, adventurous, subtle and supple as a Greek, beautiful, daring, courteous, athletic, tender, half-feminine, fascinating—who enjoys life in a buoyant, dare-devil way ; is not too wise, self-conscious, or

* Macaulay's dictum that Juan is a poor copy of the page in "Figaro" seems to be absurd, though hints from there, and from "Faublas" are not wanting.

scrupulous, to kiss any sweet mouth, which beauty, youth, health, and good fortune may raise to his own; nor so afflicted with metaphysical hypochondria, as to lament very long or very loud, when Dame Fortune for a change turns capricious and smites him.*

I am far from sure that it *is all loss* for ordinary men that they should be got to look for a moment at the world—at life, other countries and other persons, all the nooks and corners of this wonderful young world of ours—through so magical and exhilarating an atmosphere as this of Byron's—should unlearn for awhile the commonness, cant, *ennui*, and grey, sordid vapidity of their own poor selves—even of what is ostensibly highest and holiest in their existence, yet often circumscribed, dead, and conventional, after all; though, of course, I acknowledge the danger of so much explosive material being stored where youthful blood is burning. But, at any rate, a poet who could throw himself so thoroughly into this youthful gaiety of temperament cannot have been, even at this time, the played-out, ruined devil, which excellent and reverend persons made out—even if he had not proved the contrary by writing the most ideal cantos of *Childe Harold*, and many other of his most ideal works, at the same time; and those profoundly pathetic verses on his birthday, only a few days before he died for human freedom.

* This commonness, or somewhat theatrical attractiveness of Byron's heroes does in some measure, as has been truly remarked, account for their so swift and unparalleled universal popularity; these heroes appealed, in some degree, to the less-elevated instincts of admiration among men—as did Schiller's Robbers. The British public, in fact, with its accustomed generosity and discrimination, are ready to condone Byron's merits for the sake of his faults. Nevertheless, viewed with any seriousness, the tragic heroes of Byron have a moral and spiritual significance quite as deep as that of *Wallenstein*, *Macbeth*, or *Coriolanus*. After all, however, his tragic figures are rather ideal types than real men, more like *Molière's* than like *Shakespeare's*. And while *Harold*, *Manfred*, and *Cain* are embodied types of fate-stricken human passion, and illimitable imaginative yearning, *Don Juan* represents "omnivorous appetite for pleasure," which must soon end in satiety and despair.

On the whole, then, Byron is probably a greater English poet than any of his great contemporaries, except Shelley, Keats, and Wordsworth; though I do not know that it is profitable, or even really possible, to make such comparisons. I have no patience with people who, because they admire Byron, cannot, or say they cannot, admire Tennyson, and *vice versa*. Tennyson, by no means wanting in passion, glowing, rich, rare, intellectual, has given us much Byron did not give. But, assuredly, Shakespeare only towers *above* Byron. Mr. Browning, who believes in Shelley, might remember that Shelley would not have called Byron a "flat-fish," or "cackling goose;" and Mr. Carlyle, who believes in Goethe, might have remembered that Goethe said,—“Byron alone I place by my side; Scott is nothing to him.” (If we take in Scott's prose, however, then Scott must stand by our very highest below Shakespeare.) “There were giants in those days.” Byron, though he had small sympathy with his countrymen, and their foreign politics, for they took the Legitimist orthodox side in continental strife, was still an illustrious “Roman,” and proud of being the citizen of no mean city. He inveighed against “Villainton” and his battles; but yet the brilliant and gigantic struggles in Europe and in India, out of which his country emerged splendidly victorious, doubtless helped to mould his poetry of warlike strife and fiery action. On his travels, and in his foreign abodes, moreover, he was constantly in the very focus of civil and international commotion. Byron was English, however, in many respects, notably in his fragmentariness and self-contradiction, in his illogical intellect, in his unsystematic, unfinished ruggedness both of mind and style; I do not think he will ever be long out of favour with us. He is a rude mountain-mass, tropically gorgeous, not perfectly symmetrical, a mighty ocean ever and anon bursting through the dykes of our proprieties, and devastating our plains; superfine academic critics will always prefer the dainty finish of men who are lesser poets,

though defter craftsmen. Perhaps most of what Byron thought, wrote, and did, was, like his beauty, *mutilated*; but he was a glorious torso, worth a million smirking, waxen *petits-maitres*; he has the splendid imperfection of an Æschylus, a Shakespeare, a Dante, and a Hugo. Of what strange and variously mingled elements was this man formed! the breath of Genius descending from on high upon him, angels and demons perchance having also some unguessed concurrence in so vast a personality. I am often reminded of Chatterton. For was not that child one of the first English prophets of "world-sorrow," after all? Study his modern poems, and those "antiques," with the modern wail piercing through so many of them! conceived as they were in the mystic shadow of old St. Mary's Church. Consider his awful supernatural life of seventeen years—can it be that the sub-chaunter's boy of Bristol did not altogether disappear from earth after that dark mad agony of Brooke Street? Dear Chatterton! the only great dramatic poet since Massinger, save Otway.

Wandering one day in the cemetery of Ferrara, Byron found two epitaphs that struck him forcibly.

"Martini Luigi
Implora Pace."

"Lucrezia Picini
Implora eterna quiete."

These few words, he comments in a letter, say all that can be said or sought: the dead have had enough of life; all they want is rest, and this they implore. Here is all the helplessness, and humble hope, and death-like prayer that can arise from the grave. "I hope," he continues, "that whoever may survive me, and shall see me put in the foreigners' burying-ground at the Lido, within the fortress of the Adriatic, will have those two words and no more put over me—'Implora Pace!'" May he now find what he sought—not the sleep of the grave, but the "peace which passeth understanding"!

SHELLEY.

SHELLEY has been termed the most poetical of poets, and with some reason. He more seldom probably than any poet, except Shakespeare, lapses into prose. A living, original poetic diction seems to flow perennially from him ; metaphor and imagery never fail him ; his ear for melody and harmony of measure, not too obtrusive and artificial, but spontaneous, varied, and charming, was unsurpassed ; he is one of the great modern brotherhood of prophets, or interpreters of Nature ; and the substance of his message to us as seer concerning truth and life is of high value, whatever may be its error and limitation.

Mr. Matthew Arnold, indeed, has lately pronounced a severe judgment on Shelley, even venturing to affirm that he will be remembered by his prose rather than his poetry. In an essay, with which otherwise I often gravely disagreed, Mr. Swinburne replied that few critical reputations could survive such a judgment. But Mr. Arnold appeared to found his indictment against Shelley on the fact that he was the poet of clouds and sunsets rather than of man. Considering Shelley's ardent aspirations for human good, and for a more ideal condition of society, in which the majority should enjoy fuller opportunities of developing our common humanity, to say nothing of one of the most intense dramas of modern days, "The Cenci," that assertion is very questionable. Man, indeed, not men, Shelley cared

for. His men and women are mostly thin shadows, apparitions of dream or reverie, somewhat hectic and hysterical; they are usually idealized self-portraits. His was a recluse and solitary soul. No doubt Shelley is the poet of clouds and sunsets—the poet of Nature—more distinctively. But does not he who makes this a reproach to a poet fail to comprehend a characteristic note of all the best and most moving modern poetry?

I shall venture to repeat here and elsewhere the substance of a few sentences from my first essay, since that gives, as it were, the keynote and leading *motif* of my book; but some of the remarks in it apply more specifically to particular poets.

Certainly man has always been a great subject-matter for the muse; but what if a new field has been added to her triumphs, a new realm reclaimed from chaos for her achievements? That I believe is a fact. This is an age of material science, as former ages were not. It is also the age of Nature-poetry. That is indeed the note of all great recent verse—of Byron, Wordsworth, Keats, Coleridge, and Tennyson, quite as much as of Shelley. It is the right and duty of modern men to interrogate and interpret Nature. Science has furnished much material; but her own province as interpreter of Nature is quite distinct; she is minister for abstract knowledge, and practical utility; whereas poetry communes with Nature as living, and in living fellowship with humanity—as spiritual symbol, the key to which lies hidden in the heart and imagination of man, in the analogies that blend and unify the twin spheres of thought and sense. But the poetic soul is not more needed thus to find the clue to external nature than is external nature needed to reverberate light (with a new measure and manner of it added) upon the inmost recesses of intellect and emotion. “Stone him with hardened hearts harder than stones,” sings Shakespeare in “Lucrece.” How is the hardness of the callous heart understood a thousand-

fold by that image of the lesser hardness, the derived, the merely phantasmal hardness in the stone!

I look upon a few lines in Shelley's "Mont Blanc" as some of the finest he ever wrote:—

"Thou hast a voice, great mountain, to repeal
Large codes of fraud and woe."

This is the outcome of a deep penetration into the very heart and essence of that magnificent calm of the snow-spirit communing with eternal constellations, that journey "*ohne hast, und ohne rast.*" The pageant of imagery is but as avenues of sounding glory, whereby we approach the king. The yellow primrose that was only a yellow primrose and nothing more to Peter Bell, was, as I have said, less truly seen by Peter Bell than by Wordsworth, to whom it was also a yellow primrose, more accurately perceived, indeed, by more delicate and cultivated senses, but also a very infinitude beyond, only to be realized by emotion, thought, and imagination. There is no more reason that I can discover why those higher faculties should be excluded from their share and function in the revelation of truth than there is why the senses and the understanding should be so excluded. The man of science, the practical agriculturist, the engineer, have to tell us one thing, very good in its way; but the poet has to tell us something quite different, and also good in its way. Hence, I cannot enter into Mr. Ruskin's preference of Scott over Shelley as a poet, which is founded on this distinction between them. Scott (our great humanist, and romance-writer—as such next to Shakespeare) certainly had the eye of a painter, an eye for picturesque presentation of the externals of a landscape; but to him, as to most of the elder poets, it was a background and no more; while even Thomson fails to spiritualize it; that is, to feel, and make us feel its spirituality through the material veil, which is also a symbol, as do Wordsworth and Shelley. Railroads and machines, and the goods they manufacture, are well, cer-

tainly; but mental and emotional furniture is perhaps worth even a little more than the decorative furniture of drawing-rooms. Emotion may help us to discern in Nature features, analogies, moods that are indeed hers, though not all can discern them; yet, of course, I fully admit that such characteristics may be more superficial and transitory, or more essential, vital, and abiding. The imagination, as distinguished by Ruskin himself, will take hold of the heart of things, while the fancy will glance from one surface similitude to the other—may even distort truth by seizing only on these, leading away from profounder analogies, and structural homologues, more essential. But he who uses the so-called poetic diction which he has picked up by reading, without personal feeling, who deals, moreover, in frigid conceits and artifices that attract attention only to his own technical skill, has touched the lowest deep, and is no seer, but a mere clever writer of verses. As to the value of this modern poetry of Nature as a revelation, not of Nature only, but also of man, I have already asked what Wordsworth's Leech-gatherer would be without the lonely moor, and the lonely moor without the Leech-gatherer; they form together one vital unity. The Leech-gatherer is no common old man, but a very messenger of God to the poet, revealing to him the beauty of resignation and contentment. But he is disembodied, as it were, in the poet's meditative imagination; he becomes a spiritual being of high order. That is not the way Shakespeare, or Molière, or Homer would have represented him; but it may be a true, and not a false way notwithstanding; it may illuminate to the depths of him as no other method could do, and shew him as he essentially is. What would Margaret in the "Excursion" be without the cottage on the moor, and her neglected garden once so trim and tidy? What would Shelley's Alastor be without the magnificent scenery of mountain and stream amid which he moves onward to the close? They are

one. They have joined hands, and interpret one another. The result of the poet's meditation is neither man alone, nor Nature alone, but some fair, spiritual child of their espousals. This, I maintain, is somewhat distinctively new and precious added to our intellectual and emotional treasure; we cannot afford to lose it; we are ungrateful not to thank the poet who procures it.

The imaginative abstractions of Shelley are often grand, worthy of a poet of the first order, to be placed beside Milton's magnificent abstraction, "Far off His coming shone." What can be finer in this line than the periphrasis for, and personification of, earthquake in "Mont Blanc"?

"Is this the scene
Where the old earthquake demon taught her young
Ruin?"

How lovely is the personification in "Adonais!" a passage worthy to be placed beside the "Stone him with hardened hearts," which I quoted from Shakespeare.

"Out of her secret paradise she sped,
Through camps and cities, rough with stone and steel
And human hearts, which, to her æry tread
Yielding not, wounded the invisible
Palms of her tender feet where'er they fell;
And barbed tongues, and thoughts more sharp than they
Rent the soft form they never could repel,
Whose sacred blood, like the young tears of May,
Paved with eternal flowers that undeserving way."

Could dissertations, or sermons say so well how love is wounded by want of love, and the spectacle of hard indifference or cruelty?

But yet we have to note something on the other side, that may be justly urged against Shelley as poet. His perennial affluence of imagery, metaphor, beautiful phrase, and lovely rhythm, sometimes prevails to the injury of his substance, which is in danger of vanishing in a mere spray of verbal effects. His meaning is apt to be beaten out very thin. A peculiarity in him is that, whereas his power

of interpreting, and making us feel the life in Nature—often through personifications—is so remarkable (as in “The Cloud,” the “Ode to the West Wind,” and the “Hymn to Pan”), he sometimes endeavours to give a semblance of independent vitality to abstractions, which do not lend themselves readily to such endeavour. Thus, greatly as I admire “Adonais,” the elegy on the death of Keats, I do think there is a certain frigidity and unreality in parts; I will not say a want of sincerity, because there is an atmosphere of true poetry in the very subtlest and most impalpable of the Shelleyan abstractions. He breathed in rare atmospheres, where none but himself could breathe; he delighted in disporting himself in a region between heaven and earth, in what occultism terms the *astral* region, or ether, among the phantasmal shadows, or more refined volatilizations of mundane solidities. At such times, as in “The Witch of Atlas” (which is an exquisite iridescence of the fancy, and no more), he did not penetrate to the heart of things, but played, as it were, with the ghosts or wraiths of them only; more beautiful, indeed, or as beautiful as any earthly appearance to sense, but not more spirit-sustaining or substantial. He dwells often in some nebulous region of rainbows, which corresponds not to the laws of Nature as known by sense, or understanding; nor to the deeper spiritual laws in which these have their being. Thus when he sings of Dawn—

“On the brink of the night and the morning
My coursers are wont to respire;
But the earth has just whispered a warning
That their flight must be swifter than fire.”

this seems a mere gambol of fantasy, not true to the actual fact, and not suggesting anything more essential than the outward fact. In “Adonais” I think most of us refuse to realize the personification of the Dreams and Splendours, winged Persuasions and veiled Destinies, Desires and Adorations, adapted from Bion, but which, with the Sicilian

poet, were pretty, and very conceivable Cupids. Compare and contrast Wordsworth's wonderfully imaginative personifications in the "Yew Trees," that solemnize and subdue the soul.

But then to Shelley thoughts easily took palpable form, got themselves incarnated in some concrete image, more or less distinct, and thus he leaves his readers behind. He *saw* his thoughts. And, indeed, if we would pierce to the reality, we must remain in, or rather return to, the concrete, for that alone is real. It is a lovely realm of faëry, all-harmonious in itself, that the poet bodies forth. But the stanzas about Spring, Summer, Autumn, and Echo lamenting Adonais, seem almost extravagant in their sentiment, however beautiful. Only it was rather the ideal poet that Shelley was thinking of; Keats had become one with him. What lover of poetry has not wandered spell-bound in the lush bowers of "Prometheus," all woven of luxuriant trailers, and flushed over with rarest bloom? Most exquisite inventions of Paradisal loveliness! Think of the childlike spirit of the Earth asleep, in the light of his own smiles, and pillowed on his alabaster arms! The martyrdom of the demi-god, Prometheus, benefactor of man, is the noble central motive; but it is overgrown with entangled episode, imagery, and musical song. The poetry of Shelley wanders away at its own sweet will; there is an absence of concentrating, architectonic, moulding power, giving unity; although we find, generally, unity of mood, and lyrical feeling. The poet fades away down every lovely avenue of fresh suggestion opened out to him by his position of the moment. And so we are affected with a cloying excess of sweetness and profusion. But "*tell me where the senses mix,*" sings Tennyson. Shelley can. His metaphors, his epithets and similitudes, make you feel their essential kinship and unity; how they melt into and blend with one another, like odours of many flowers in the still garden of the soul. But in such odes as the "Ode

to Liberty," I do think there is no little confusion of imagery, and substitution of sounding words for definite thought, or representation, an error so fatally reproduced and intensified in some of the poet's disciples. Even the music is not always present. But what faults are not atoned for by such beauties as those in the utterances of Panthea?

And while Shelley is bold and extravagant, it is an Æschylean extravagance, that of genius, often magnificent. All through "Prometheus" he displays the mythopœic faculty of the world's primæval poets, a faculty shared with him by Keats. That passage about the orb which typifies the Earth, and the childlike spirit asleep in it, the lovely picture of the Chariot of the Hours, the Songs of the Earth and Moon, are instances; also his visions of the fairies, or nature-spirits, as sung by the fawns, with the delicious nightingale passage, all which Mr. Brooke has called "Music of the woods." The "Mother of the months" is "borne in her thin boat, floating up from her interlunar cave," "that orb'd maiden, with white fire laden, whom mortals name the moon." One might almost be looking, as I have done, at those sacred pictures in the temple-tombs of Thebes, painted so many thousands of years ago. He tells us stories about the sun, moon, and stars; he narrates their adventures. Of course I don't vouch for the strict accuracy of all that; still I fancy it is much more true than to regard them as dead machines. We are told, indeed, by prosaists, and Dryasdusts, that all religion, including Nature-worship, arises from the mistake savages make in taking dreams of their dead friends for ghosts of them, which ghosts are afterwards stupidly supposed to animate natural objects. Well, I wonder what Shelley and Keats would have said to that? But we need not discuss it here and now! The truth is, that Nature is animate to the child, the primæval man, and the true poet. She was animate to Hesiod, and Homer, though they had their own way of

expressing their conviction ; and we have ours. Certainly the new birth of inductive science, and our modern habit of observing details minutely, enable us to regard Nature more truly, as more aloof from man, more as she is in herself. Shelley saw trance-visions with shut eyes ; they are ideal landscapes that he mostly paints us, hardly the landscapes of earth ; these he beheld with inward eye, as he saw the vision of the child in the bay of Lerici, when his outward eye was open—the child, who may have been his own little William, beckoning him from the sea ; and shortly after, we know how his beloved friend, the sea, received him into her bosom. But in the pageantry of sky and cloud and sea and forest and flowers he is at home, in these he revels, the very Turner of poetry. “The Sensitive Plant” reveals the essential soul of flowers. All the feminine sensitiveness of the poet, his gentleness, his almost irresponsible *naïveté* of uncontrollably childlike impulse, made him feel with the pure, cool, passive, meek-blooded world of flowers, as with the world of infancy and animal life. Well did he call himself Ariel. He was a kind of elf, but semi-human—an Æolian lyre, breathed upon by every wandering wind, and yielding sweetest melody. As an instance at once of his strong, clangorous, inspiring verbal music, so germane to the song of glorious aspiration for humanity that lifts him, and of many other excellences too, I need refer only to the chorus from “Hellas,” where note especially the fine phrase, “fed with morning,” applied to the eagle.

Then, as an example of sonorous blank verse, and of the happy employment of sounding geographical names—one of the notes of great contemplative poets, for instance, of Milton—we may take many passages from “Alastor,” and again, others from that poem to show the poet’s tender gentleness with all his brothers and sisters, the lower animals. The lines about Ethiopia powerfully appeal to one who has seen the temple of Denderah in Egypt :—

" His wandering step,
 Obedient to high thoughts, has visited
 The awful ruins of the days of old,
 Athens, and Tyre, and Baalbek, and the waste
 Where stood Jerusalem, the fallen towers
 Of Babylon, the eternal pyramids,
 Memphis, and Thebes, and whatsoe'er of strange,
 Sculptured on alabaster obelisk,
 Or jasper tomb, or mutilated sphinx,
 Dark Ethiopia in her desert hills
 Conceals. Among the ruined temples there,
 Stupendous columns, and wild images
 Of more than man, where marble demons watch
 The Zodiac's brazen mystery, and dead men
 Hang their mute thoughts on the mute walls around,
 He lingered, poring on memorials
 Of the world's youth ; through the long burning day
 Gazed on those speechless shapes ; nor when the moon
 Filled the mysterious halls with floating shades,
 Suspended be the task, but ever gazed
 And gazed, till meaning on his vacant mind
 Flashed like strong inspiration, and he saw
 The thrilling secrets of the birth of time."

A good example of Shelley's grand mountain landscapes we may find in "Prometheus," where he paints the Alps at dawn. He loves the sublime, grandiose, vague ; but in depicting clouds, and wood, and sky, and flower, he was exquisitely minute, and true to fact. The noble lines written among the Euganean Hills are too long to quote ; but these, as also "Julian and Maddalo," contain great pictures of sunset. The brief lyrics, which after all are perhaps the most inestimable of Shelley's gifts to us, merely as poetry, for perfection of form, and exquisite feeling, express for the most part indefinable unsatisfied longing, inconsolable regret, tender but poignant sorrow for the transitoriness of earthly things, beauty, love, and all delight ; also an oppressive sense of the perversity and hard-heartedness of men. They are as the low outweeping of a heart overweighted with the misery of the world. The delicate evanescent grace of them is like nothing else in literature :—

“When the lamp is shattered,
 The light in the dust lies dead ;
 When the cloud is scattered,
 The rainbow’s glory is shed ;
 When the lute is broken,
 Sweet notes are remembered not ;
 When the lips have spoken,
 Loved accents are soon forgot.

“As music and splendour
 Survive not the lamp and the lute,
 The heart’s echoes render
 No song when the spirit is mute :
 No song but sad dirges,
 Like the wind in a ruined cell,
 Or the mournful surges
 That ring the dead seaman’s knell.

“When hearts have once mingled,
 Love first leaves the well-built nest ;
 The weak one is singled
 To endure what it once possessed.
 O Love, who bewailest
 The frailty of all things here,
 Why choose you the frailest
 For your cradle, your home, and your bier?”

Now I can say but a word on the poet’s philosophy. That we get in many poems—in “Epipsychidion,” “Mont Blanc,” “The Hymn to Intellectual Beauty ;” also in “Prometheus,” “Hellas,” and “Adonais.” The negative and materialistic stage of “Queen Mab,” written when he was a boy, was soon transcended and left behind. Shelley is an idealist in philosophy. The world is a phantasmagoria of impressions and ideal, belonging to the soul, or spirit ; and Love, or Ideal Beauty, the essential nature of that spirit, the pervading principle of the universe. But all is one, and diversity, variety, are but passing manifestations of that One. This, briefly and meagrely, is the idea that runs through the poetry. He deifies impulse, instinct, and resents constraint or law imposed *ab extra* by the State, or even by conscience within. He would urge that the law of Love is the highest law ; yet it is pretty

well impossible in our present condition to merge the sense of Duty altogether in that, though in the ideal and future existence even the sense of Duty may be transcended. But swift transition was the keynote of Shelley's impressionable nature, and it has been truly said that he thirsted for rapture, highly-strung enjoyment, the only condition of which is change. So no one laments the fading of our joys more pathetically. On the whole, Shelley was, and is, our most inspired and possessed poet, the most spontaneous and demonic—best example of that madness which Plato ascribes to the true bard. He is carried out of himself indeed, and reflects the world; yet his is an intense and rich personality; it is in one very distinct personality that the world is thus reflected; the poet is full of elaborate self-pourtrayals, though idealized, and therefore representative. Yet I think he had not strength and grip enough, condensation and fusion enough, to make him grasp the idea of will, of personality, of individual identity, nor does he make us feel it. That is to me the defect of his idealism; for ideas and phenomena can only be in thinking persons of given character; and that leaves him the poet of some delicious thrill or shimmer of ever-varying impressions or appearances, as also of impermanence and inconstancy.

And, indeed, Nature-worship is related to impulse, passion, instinct, though there is a Nature beyond and beneath nature, beyond mere appearance. There is a nature for sense and feeling, as well as a Nature for conscience, affection, and reason. The fawn and the satyr, the nymph, the naiad, and the elf, laugh and play there. But beyond and behind them are angels, children, spirits of the just made perfect, and God Himself. There was a certain lack of stability, backbone, and prehensile grasp in what Shelley wrote, even as in what he did. Love can only be in lovers; if you are to have noble constancy and permanence, you must be individual, as well as universal and impersonal. Perhaps the most beautiful expression of Shelley's idealism

is put into the mouth of the mysterious Ahasuerus in "Hellas."

"Adonais," besides philosophy, sublimated by imagination and feeling into poetry, contains a strange longing prophesy of the manner of the poet's own death.

"Made one with nature!" he sings, concerning the dead; and who does not know that those we call dead may be made one with man—be felt as a presence in the home and abroad, to strengthen and sustain, to elevate and to bless—may even look out with their own dear eyes from eyes we name living?

"Adonais" is not more about Keats than about Shelley. It is altogether in that sphere of the ideal and beautiful into which the poet ever lifted any special subject and person when he touched them. And thus, too, "Epipsy-chidion" hardly concerns Emilia Viviani, but rather that supernal, celestial loveliness for which his spirit thirsted, and with which, for a moment, he identified that particular lady.

Shelley was, indeed, as Mrs. Browning named him, "in his white ideal, statue-blind." He would exhaust and drain all to the dregs, which must end in satiety and disillusion; if you will worship your idol in its passing, momentary aspect, then you will assuredly have to break it. As one critic observes, Shelley would leave no veils on, brook no reticences. Psyche will behold Cupid with her bodily eyes, and retain him in all his visible beauty. But the god will not have it so, and vanishes from her. For Shelley the ideal is naked, but he invests it with the rosy hue and glory of imagination; (there is no poet less gross or sensual, all is shadowy and ethereal;) and so, when the reality mocks the dream, like a wilful babe, in petulant disappointment, he flings the toy away. Poor Emilia Viviani! poor Harriett! But that rosy hue and glory belong not to the phenomenon—to the passing appearance and temporary semblance; they belong to the eternal idea

and reality underlying these. Now, in order to arrive there it behoves mortals to respect modesties, mysteries, concealments. "*Noli me tangere!*" "*I ascend to the Father.*" Take not the part for the whole; be willing to renounce the arc, that you may follow after and dwell in the full orb. The raptures of "*Epipsychidion*" (a poem of wonderful beauty) seem presumptuously to overleap eternal boundaries, and violate those awful penetralia of individuality, aspiring to lose distinction in a unit, which would be neither unity, nor possession, nor knowledge through love and sympathy, but rather the blank chaos and non-being of an unorganized, inharmonious, and essentially unrealizable absorption.

Such, too, was his theory of government. Men in the ideal condition were to be tribeless, classless, unobedient to law; and yet he too could anathematize impulses, when they did not tend in the direction of his personal taste (see the "*Witch of Atlas*"). But this removal of all distinctions, and differentiations would not of itself furnish any higher form of society—beautiful, organized body politic, or *civitas Dei*. It is hardly wise to break abruptly with that past, which, entering into our very blood and constitution, encompasses us as an atmosphere—even though Nature herself may always contrive to grow *something* out of whatever ruins man may take upon him to sow with salt.

A poet, however, is not bound to suggest details; rather, his function is to see, feel, and body forth ideals. Otherwise, one might be disposed to remark that universal love, and the mere abolition of all forms of government are prescriptions sufficiently vague and unfruitful, perhaps mainly available for the founding of constitutions in cloud-cuckoo-land. There is, indeed, little of practical suggestion about Shelley. Nor need you ask a poet for it; only his more thorough-going admirers tell us that we may look to him for that, as well as everything else. And if you do not insist on casting all his burning exhortations and asseverations in

sober prose, reducing them to dogmas and propositions for the understanding, then are they pregnant, and vivifying enough for the initiated. It has been disputed whether a poet (but let me explain, once for all, that I never mean by this term a mere writer of verse) is, or is not in advance of his time. There seems little evidence that he is so in respect of remoulding and anticipating future institutions, or particular discoveries, such flashes of insight as that of Goethe concerning colour being rare enough to start forth as exceptions. Dante was an indifferent political prophet, judging by the "De Monarchia;" yet it is true that a poet has often profounder insight into principles, human character, or Nature, than a dry philosophical reasoner, or hard prosaic observer; and he throws all into living words for us. But as to details, though he *may* be in advance of his time—in which case he will be unpopular, and only appreciated later—he is more often interpreter of the dominant ideas of his generation, and not rarely flings himself back passionately upon the past, vindicating what has been for the moment forgotten, but will have to be vivified again in a fairer growth of more comprehensive synthesis.

Shelley was indeed a standard-bearer in the van of freedom, a pioneer in the emancipated front of human thought. But as regards detail, he was only the organ of his day's iconoclasm. All will be perfect when you have pulled down kings, and priests, and existing institutions. And yet these are the outgrowth of human nature. Perhaps, therefore, it might be well to improve and reform that also; then possibly it may grow better institutions. Still, outworn institutions assuredly are hindrances to free and healthy growth.

The "Divine Comedy" was rather behind than in advance of the dawning religious philosophies of that age. And yet Dante's "Apocalypse" is in substance for all time. Remember the magnificent symbolism of the white, and dark, and blood-red steps of Purgatory!

With respect to Shelley's celebrated teaching in "Epipsy-chidion," that in love "to divide is not to take away," I quite believe that this is the true ideal to be aimed at. It ought to be, and will be thus; in varied friendships, in general kindness and mutual help, approximations should be made thereto. Yet one must confess that Shelley himself was scarcely successful in his own life realizations. To divide, with him, *was* apparently to take away; at least one would be glad to hear poor Harriett Westbrook's opinion on the subject.

I cannot agree with Kingsley that genius should be expected to be more moral than talent. It is possession, absorption, dominant sensibility, and power of expression; does what it must do, and has its own individual manner of doing. In some respects, that is more allied to weakness than to strength. We "have this treasure in earthen vessels." It is an organ of the universal soul. But if we pardon the errors of genius for what it gives—even admitting that it could hardly be without them—allow the *défauts de ses qualités*, let us not proceed to confound the errors with the virtues, and confuse good and evil in one blind hysterical indiscriminate worship. Shelley has been by some admirers compared to Christ. But the grand distinction of Christ is calm patience, chivalrous generosity, the sublime forbearance of a magnanimity that forgives and still believes; charity that creates a spirit under the ribs of death, engenders and sustains life by divining it yet warm and dormant where all but love assumes it absent, pours forth freely of its own life till, by inbreathing and blood transfusion, a living soul is roused, and dead Lazarus comes forth. The love and ardour of Pygmalion called a warm Galatea from cold marble. And so would a greater and stronger have found the ideal in that kind and homely, but weak child, Harriett, whom once the poet loved, and who loved him. Fate and circumstance had thrown this girl upon his protection; nay, eagerly and voluntarily had he

assumed the responsibility ; whatever her faults, it was not one to be shaken off with a light heart. But suddenly he left her, for days even uninformed of his whereabouts, and with inadequate means, until she learned that, having found his "affinity," he would return to her no more. That was like the conduct of Lady Byron, whether better or worse, Shelley being a man who professed, and certainly felt, profound sympathy with human wrong, burning indignation with human injustice, I will not take upon myself to determine. But I do think that to condone such an action, is to condone the worst kind of aristocratic arrogance—the intolerant arrogance of intellectual superiority. Are the intellectual commonalty indeed but as an orange for their superiors to suck and throw away? It is not men of the first order who think so, though that appears to have been the opinion of Goethe. I do not believe it was that of our own "glorious Willy," any more than of Sakya-muni. And it could scarcely have been the deliberate conviction of a sincere and genuine democrat like Shelley. His life does not suggest it ; and yet a curious light is thrown upon the poet's democratic principles by what he said to Trelawney on board the Greek man-of-war, when the latter asked him, "Is this your idea of Hellas?" and he answered, "No ; but it is of hell," because, forsooth, the loud rough swearing sea-dogs of modern Greece offended the fastidious delicacy of his private taste. And yet these were the men who fought and died at Missolonghi. But the poet could not see through to the ideal in them, that burst forth later. However, this may have been only from an almost womanly shyness and refinement. An Ariel, an angel, an inspired babe, full of sweet impulses, rather than a man ! By all means let us reverence and pardon our dear poet, but not call his follies and human lapses supreme wisdom and virtue, because they are his ! That his behaviour to Harriett was chivalric and manly, not all the pretty tremors, or shrill shrieks of "uncircumcised Philistine "

from the neo-Israelite camp of æsthetic culture, upon the evidence now before us, can make me ever admit. The young and weak girl he took from her father, and from school, and swore to cherish, he soon abandoned for a prey to some cruel domination of hereditary foes within, and yet more cruel mercy of a callous world without. Nor does it appear that the deed weighed too heavily upon him. His very personal poems reveal little of a Manfred's or a Cain's remorse. His own example, therefore, proves that humanity is hardly yet lifted high enough for "love" to be "an unerring light, and joy its own security."

The indictment of Mr. Jeaffreson, though readable, minute, and careful, is rather conventional, and malignant. But one awaits with anxious interest the further and authorized revelations of Professor Dowden.

WORDSWORTH.

IT is doubtful if Wordsworth is as much read and pondered as he ought to be. He is commonly regarded as a describer and interpreter of Nature. And of course that he is. But on studying carefully the chief part of his best work, one certainly derives the impression rather of what Matthew Arnold especially calls attention to—*his fertile application of ideas to human life*. The mass and main weight of impression is, I think, ethical. You are braced in the mountain atmosphere of this poet. You become stronger, more hopeful, encouraged to do your own work vigorously and well. It is an air of faith—stimulating, healthful, with no miasma of luxurious languor, oppression, or despair. There is an outlook from it, as from a snow-peak or a strong tower, upon fair infinite horizons, however veiled in vapour and dim with distance. It is a Puritan poetry, breathing comfort and courage, yet I think, with little of the Puritan intolerance, and blasphemy of the good God. Being of old a lover of Wordsworth, yet having laid him aside for some years, I had somehow thought of him as a serene recluse, withdrawn from the terrible world, and refusing to face its deadly problems—living by preference among virtuous Dalesmen, cheerful, frugal, prosperous, content. Now this view has assuredly a measure of truth. This was the life he did elect to live, and his outlook on human nature had consequently limitations:—

“The moving accident is not my trade ;
To freeze the blood I have no ready arts ;
'Tis my delight alone in summer shade
To pipe a simple song for thinking hearts.”

The male characters he depicts are very much his own, and those he found at his own doors. He, and Byron, who was equally limited in his way, could not understand each other, and Wordsworth never even appreciated Keats. But we may turn to other poets for other treasures. And this view has only a degree of truth ; for you may find a deal of human nature in your own soul, in your own house, and at your own door, if you know how to look for it. Charlotte Brontë did ; and Wordsworth is full of sympathy with sorrow. There is no pathos profounder than his. Some one speaks of the iron pathos of Crabbe. The phrase seems to apply to Wordsworth. It is a kind of inarticulate, still-life pathos. That of the episode of Margaret in the “Excursion” would be crushing but for the old narrator’s own calm faith. Our poet is austere, self-restrained : the storm and whirlwind of passion are not for him, as they are for Byron—nor fierce negation and revolt, which are the birth-pangs of the Time-spirit, labouring to engender a new and larger life, casting off an old form as the snake sloughs his skin.

Certainly Wordsworth is one of our very great poets, for he can both soar with dignity, and stoop with grace. His good and enduring work is not only ample in quantity, but varied in scope. I say this in spite of recent detraction from writers who might have been expected to know better, but who have elected to make themselves the mouthpiece of ignorant prejudice. Wordsworth could hardly hope to escape the universal depreciation of Carlyle, but to Mr. Ruskin he might have exclaimed : “*Et tu, Brute!*” One may be sorry indeed, but one ought hardly to be surprised that Mr. Rossetti should have told his biographer that he grudged Wordsworth “every vote he got.” For, although

he himself has done some very fine work, yet he was the head of a school which is the natural enemy of Wordsworth, and which would seem to have aspired to force us back into those old bad paths whence Wordsworth came to deliver us—one which can have little in common with a poet whose mission, as he conceived it, was to “console the afflicted, to add sunshine to daylight by making the happy happier, to teach the young and the gracious of every age to see, to think, to feel, and therefore become more actively and securely virtuous.” The beautiful lines on the “Feast of Brougham Castle” describe him perfectly :—

“ Love had he found in huts where poor men lie,
His daily teachers had been woods and rills,
The silence that is in the starry sky,
The sleep that is among the lonely hills.”

But Wordsworth expresses the conviction that his poetry “will co-operate with the benign tendencies of human nature and society, and will in its degree be efficacious in making men better, wiser, and happier.” Cheerful wisdom, and a prevailing inward happiness, belong to him, very stimulating and refreshing in these days when languor, pessimism, despondency, and doubt have invaded so many hearts, and so much literature. Once he contrasts the nightingale, that “creature of a fiery heart,” with the stockdove, rather to the disadvantage of the former :—

“ She sang of love with quiet blending,
Slow to begin, and never ending,
Of serious faith, and inward glee ;
That was the song, the song for me !”

How enviable the disposition of that man who could say, sweet-natured through all harsh judgment and neglect—

“ I’ve heard of hearts unkind, kind deeds
With coldness still returning ;
Alas, the gratitude of men
Hath oftener left me mourning !”

Politically one may regret that the excesses and failures of the Revolution should have thrown back this "lost leader" so far into the arms of blind reaction and dull convention. Still it is not to be denied that the religious, reverential, ancestral elements needed a poetic champion and interpreter. For the profane, all-dissolving understanding would tear remorselessly away all our mosses and lichens, all our herbage and flowers, laying us bare to the very stones; nay, threatens to take the solid earth from under our feet, if that were possible! Scott and Wordsworth were formidably matched with Shelley and Byron; and all these powers alike had a great work to do. Moreover, Wordsworth was himself essentially a child and product of the Revolution. For he glorified, or rather taught us to recognize the glory in so-called ordinary persons and ordinary things, forbidding us to call anything common or unclean. Think of Michael, Margaret, the Old Leech-gatherer, the Brothers, the Old Cumberland Beggar, Matthew, Ruth, Lucy Gray, the Mad Mother, the woman in "The Thorn,"—figures chosen from the crowd, ennobled by misfortune or simple virtues, not refined or cultured with conventional refinement or culture, elementary and grand, dumbly pathetic in their pain, or innocent, sweet, and true, transfigured in the solemn light of imaginative charity, and deep pitiful contemplation. Herein, as in his interpretation of Nature, he proved himself a poet of the utmost originality, although the honour of this glorification of our common humanity must be shared with him by Burns. Nor is it fair to ascribe the revival of our poetry from the degradation entailed on it by Pope's school exclusively to these. For we remember Goldsmith, Gray, Cowper, Chatterton, Blake; even Shenstone, Dyer, and Parnell. Still there was a distinctly new element in Wordsworth's interpretation of Nature, upon which I shall speak later.

Mr. Myers, in his admirable study of Wordsworth, well

says: "The maxims of Wordsworth's form of natural religion were uttered before Wordsworth only in the sense in which the maxims of Christianity were uttered before Christ. The essential spirit of the lines on Tintern Abbey was for practical purposes as new to mankind as the essential spirit of the Sermon on the Mount. Not the isolated expression of ideas, but the fusion into a whole in one memorable personality is that which connects them for ever with a single name." This is excellent. My only doubt would be how far Rousseau must share with him this honour. But I repeat that the range of Wordsworth is wide, for, besides those fine narrative sketches already spoken of—austere statues hewn out of grey granite—we have delicate lyrics of childhood and dumb animals, occasional lyrics of rare perfume, also some of the noblest reflective sonnets in the language, together with the most faithful, yet spiritualized descriptive verse, added to philosophical poetry of very high order; though of the latter there is perhaps only a little of supreme excellence. In the fullest sense Wordsworth lacked dramatic power, but he did throw himself into, and graphically present the essentials of certain characters. As to the intrusion of his own personality—must not every great lyric meditative poet intrude his personality, and has he not done so? Do not Byron, Shelley, Burns, Leopardi, Tennyson, Victor Hugo? But it is a typical, a more or less representative personality which he "obtrudes"—one that feels more intensely the common feelings, one that sees more clearly and deeply the common visions, expressing these more perfectly in the supreme, royal, melodious utterance of song. And beyond this, he may be endowed with a prophet's revealing power.

That Wordsworth may on rare occasions have mistaken his own superficial, transient idiosyncrasy for that personality which is of eternal worth is probably true. And this seems partly due to Wordsworth's very excellence

The spectacle of this poet, living on and greatening, serenely confident, unshaken, unsoured, benignant, amid persistent neglect, ridicule, defamation, is noble and unique. Yet he must have known that he, like all original men of genius, could only be addressing an audience "fit though few," and that he had necessarily to mould his own public. Still not many artists have been so little sensitive to external sympathy or the want of it. There must have been some happy domination of calm and balanced temperament; over his House of Life presided chaste and peaceful stars; while within him lived a deep well-spring of religious faith. He was fortunate in his domestic surroundings, but none of these can avail a genius of inharmonious nature, harassed by ill-health. But this temper, together with his own immovable self-approval, his seclusion from the world, and the slight response vouchsafed by it to the deep accents of his soul, are perchance responsible for a certain opinionative hardness, and undue accentuation of his less amiable peculiarities; he was thrown too much upon himself, and the standards of his immediate circle, and so wrote with scarce sufficient reference to universal human feeling, emphasizing unduly the petty details of his experience; caring chiefly to satisfy the desire for self-expression, even that engendered by casual moods of merely passing interest.

We feel this in the grave sonnets commencing "Jones, as from Calais," and "Spade, with which Wilkinson;" also in the earnest copy of verse addressed to the landlady of his lodgings. But we feel it equally in the bald and pompous metrical prose he poured forth so abundantly, quite unconscious of its demerit; nor can it be denied that some of his pieces are trivial, though I am disposed to agree with Mrs. Owen when she contends in her paper read before the Wordsworth Society that there is far less trivial verse in Wordsworth than is commonly supposed. Even the "Idiot Boy," and "Peter Bell," have fine motives; there

is, I think, a certain triviality about these poems ; but that is rather because the materials are imperfectly fused in the poet's imagination, insufficiently penetrated by it, than because the subjects are trivial.

There is truth, however, in the criticism that Wordsworth poured forth verse too incessantly, and on too slender a provocation. It will not do even for a great poet to break into verse on every possible occasion, from the singing of a tea-kettle to the opening of a Mechanics' Institute, or the marriage of a princess, however excellent and respectable such occurrences may be. In other words, a poet must be strongly moved to write if he would write well. There is something in the Demonic inspiration, in the Divine Afflatus after all, nor will that always breathe when it is whistled for. You may summon spirits from the vasty deep—but will they come ?

Then no doubt there are occasional jars ; gratings of harsh or inharmonious ideas, and pedestrian words. Wordsworth was not a perfect artist, but perhaps he was something better ! Remember Browning's "Andea del Sarto, the faultless painter." Wordsworth, Byron, and Shelley were far greater poets than many a more faultless one. What, again, of Shakespeare ?

But after all I deny that the so-called faultless ones *are* faultless. Gray, and Campbell wrote very little, and yet a good deal that they wrote is very indifferent poetry indeed, however correct and "elegant" as mere diction it may be. Of "Don Juan" Byron writes to Murray : "You may think yourself lucky if half of it is good. What poem is all good ?" Dare we tell the truth about Dante or Milton ? If so one may be bold enough to aver that there is almost as much dull and dry reading in the "Divina Commedia," or in "Paradise Lost" and "Regained," as there is in the "Prelude" and the "Excursion : " but there is also much magnificent poetry ; and I believe there is a great deal of that in Wordsworth. As regards *triviality*, there are few subjects

that remain trivial after a true poet has laid his hand upon the heart of them. When he breathes over them words of consecration, the great transubstantiation takes place. Nay, rather, he has just opened our eyes to what they are. Instead of trivial, for all their simplicity of theme and treatment, the poems about Lucy, the "Reverie of Poor Susan," "We are Seven," the "Blind Highland Boy," the "Childless Father," and many another like them are perfect poetry.

In his ballad-anecdotes, and narrative poems, Wordsworth deliberately elected to write in homely phrase, and in simple, direct, inornate language. In revolting against the tawdry frippery, the cold, insincere, uninspired, conventional diction then in vogue, appealing to no heart and no vision whatsoever, perchance he went a little too far: but "The Waggoner," for instance, would have been the worse, not the better, for ornamental, inappropriate phrasemongery. There Wordsworth made too much of mere insignificant details of every day. Good expression, a fine style, is that best adapted to heighten, and interpret the substance of what is said or sung; and this may be either dignified, elaborate, metaphorical, or homely and direct. Wordsworth commanded both styles. I maintain that for interpenetration of form and matter, which is style, he has no superior. That is true of the "Ode on Immortality," "Yew Trees," "There was a Boy," "Tintern," and equally so of "Michael," "Margaret," "We are Seven." In proof of it listen to this, but listen to it also for proof that the poet's heart, to whatever party he professed to belong, beat in deep sympathy with human rights. It is addressed to Toussaint, the defeated slave, imprisoned by the tyrant Napoleon:—

"Thou hast left behind

Powers that will work for thee, earth, air, and skies :
There's not a breathing of the common wind
That will forget thee ; thou hast great allies ;
Thy friends are exultations, agonies,
And love, and man's unconquerable mind."

This is superb in matter and form, severe, majestic and unlaboured. Other bards have been equal to writing antique poems like "Dion" and "Laodamia," fine as they are ; these have perhaps some of the inevitable academic coldness of all such verse, or I should instance them also. But what can be greater than the bald simplicity of the larger part of "Michael"—"a baldness as of mountain tops," as Matthew Arnold well says? What can be more profound in pathos? The story is briefly that Michael and his wife, having been well-to-do mountaineers, suffered reverses of fortune, and at last, with much heart-sorrow, resolved to send their boy, Luke, adored by them both, away to seek his fortune in the great city where others had prospered before him. He had been his father's constant companion on the hills, learning from him the shepherd's trade. And before he goes, his father wishes him to lay the first stone of the new sheepfold they were to have built together, ere the necessity arose for sending the boy away:—

" But lay one stone—

Here, lay it for me, Luke, with thine own hands.
Nay, boy, be of good hope ;—we both may live
To see a better day.

* * * * *

Now fare thee well—

When thou returnest, thou in this place wilt see
A work which is not here : a covenant
'Twill be between us. But, whatever fate
Befall thee, I shall love thee to the last,
And bear thy memory with me to the grave."

The boy went wrong, and the father's heart broke ; but he worked still at the unfinished sheepfold, only now alone.

" 'Tis believed by all

That many and many a day he thither went,
And never lifted up a single stone."

I do not envy the heart that cannot feel the marvellous pathos of the conclusion. Akin to it, for the deep humanity of its interest, is "The Leech-gatherer ;" but here you have

a style replete with dignity, because it is a meditative poem, dealing with general principles, only *illustrated* by the Leech-gatherer himself as he is contemplated by the poet. Note here too the strange other-world abstraction into which Wordsworth sometimes fell, while in face of the homely external fact, which from opaque becomes a transparent medium for him, letting in the too dazzling sun—a loophole, a portal opening upon the mysteries of eternity. The ordinary old man grows disembodied for him, and appears as God's angel, like the beggar leper in the legend for her who received him.

Then note the serene faith of the conclusion, the lesson preached here unconsciously by the aged man's example, as by the old Cumberland beggar; the same lesson that is preached consciously by a similarly simple intellectual nature, though one very rich in moral and spiritual gifts, in the conclusion of "Margaret."

Next, I come to some of the poems referring to the period of childhood—"We are Seven," and one of the poems on Lucy. With these two I shall connect the great "Ode on Immortality," for these three all refer, not only to childhood, but to death. They are simply perfect, each in its own delightful way. Most sad, but wonderful verses:—

"A slumber did my spirit seal;
I had no human fears:
She seemed a thing that could not feel
The touch of earthly years.

"No motion has she now, no force,
She neither hears nor sees,
Rolled round in earth's diurnal course,
With rocks, and stones, and trees."

Here the terrible outward appearance of death mesmerises with strong eyes, and clasps to its own cold breast, as in a death-trance, with no outlook beyond, the sensitive soul of this poet, as it often did that of Shakespeare before him. Contrast this with "We are Seven," where the child over whom the glory of its immortality "broods like the

day," feeling her life in every limb, knows not, understands not, calmly overlooks death, while cheerily sitting on the green mound of the very grave;—herein related to the spiritual man or woman, who sees through and dwells not on the appearance, but builds a wondrous fabric of divine significance on the assumption of an immortality, which he stays not, nor condescends to prove.

Let me now quote one short passage from the magnificent "Ode:"—

"Our birth is but a sleep and a forgetting :
The soul that rises with us, our life's star,
Hath had elsewhere its setting
And cometh from afar.
Not in entire forgetfulness,
And not in utter nakedness,
But trailing clouds of glory do we come
From God, who is our home :
Heaven lies about us in our infancy !"

What can be more stately in expression? How well married are sense, phrase, and sound!

Mr. Matthew Arnold, found fighting often so nobly against the prejudices of to-day, yet in this instance perchance partaking the repugnance of his *Zeit-Geist*, of the spirit of his generation to Divine Philosophy, looks askance at the Ode, as at other philosophical poetry of Wordsworth. But, as Milton tells us, "divine philosophy is not harsh and crabbed, as dull fools suppose, but musical as is Apollo's lute"—musical especially when the cold lyre of it is played upon by lambent flames from a poet's heart; by such *Æolian* airs as wander from his soul. Too often indeed it is far otherwise, when not so transformed, in the mere uninspired verse even of Wordsworth; as more recently also in the harsh, too crabbed, metrical dissertations of another philosophical poet, who at his best is yet powerful and profoundly poetic. There is, no doubt, a good deal of polemical, prosy, quasi-clerical moralizing in Wordsworth, justifying Mr. Arnold's amusing allusion to "the bold bad

men and women who haunt social science congresses," and quote therefrom only for the correctness of the sentiments. But I venture to think the great "Ode on Immortality" a transcendent expression of profound primary truths, of highest import for all. Wherever the child came from immediately before birth, the auroral freshness of his dewy joy, so innocent and so pure, his guileless unquestioning trust, the glory that all things wear to him, the confiding humbleness, all prove that "their angels behold the face of the Father," that the gleam of the sanctuary is upon him—though the glory may return even more glorious when dark experience grows as fuel in the fire, when the Divine Child looks forth in his eternal youth from the sadder and wiser eyes of man. The child-spirit is alone in the highest sense immortal. "Except ye be converted and become as little children——" we know the rest. But the philosophy of imagination suffers detriment when translated into the language of understanding. In the sonnets we read:—

" Plain living, and high thinking are no more ;
The homely beauty of the good old cause
Is gone ; our peace, our fearful innocence,
And pure religion breathing household laws."

And now we come finally to the poetry of external Nature. But in doing so we do not take leave, you will find, of the human and philosophical poetry. They are intermingled in Wordsworth. His rendering of Nature is a spiritualized rendering, the presentment of some spiritual offspring which she engenders in a poetic soul; of the light—

" That never was on sea or land,
The consecration, and the poet's dream."

Our poet, indeed, has been accused of too great minuteness in his delineations of Nature. No doubt there *may be* too much minuteness, if the general impression is interfered with by the laborious attention required for the appreciation of detail; but this will be only, I think, when there is a

want of unity in the mood or emotion with which the scene is contemplated by the poet. The objection probably owes its origin to a criticism of Lessing's, which I have never thought well-founded, though it has met with very marked approval. Substantially it is, that word-painting of *co-existing details* is inadmissible, because, whereas in a landscape or picture the eye takes in the whole effect at once, words being only successively pronounced and understood, there cannot be the simultaneity of effect in a verbal description; you have to piece the parts together, as you would in a puzzle. That of course is true; but then it is *not* true that in a landscape or picture, either the eye or the mind *can* take in the whole effect at once: on the contrary, you must travel over and realize the parts in succession, though this may doubtless be done in a painting with more rapidity, and in the former case you have to translate the sound symbols of one sense into their visual equivalents. The difficulty is that most persons only observe external nature occasionally and vaguely. To them, as to Peter Bell, "a primrose is a yellow primrose, and nothing more." It is, therefore, very difficult for them to realize a scene from the verbal description of it. But in any case the intelligence, the sensibility, the sympathy must be there; we must be able to synthesize, to recreate the whole for our own selves. Neither Nature, nor painter, nor poet, can save us the trouble of doing that.

But the poet can express, or suggest the analogies and affinities that add so much charm to the visible scene. The painter and the landscape leave much more to be done by the spectator himself. He must furnish a much larger contribution from his own spiritual stores, in order to arrive at the same rich result; for the poet can relate the past history of natural objects, and, ministering to all the inlets of sensation, can blend space and colour with odour and with sound, all being obedient to his so potent Art. Is the ordinary man sure to have in readiness these materials for

use in the interpretation of landscape or picture? If not, he may resort with advantage to the poet. Even then, however, trained faculties are implied. Neither Nature, nor painter, nor poet, can speak with profit to the lazy, the worldly-minded, or the unprepared. There is, indeed, a "wise passiveness," but it must be responsive and ready, if it is to reap what Wordsworth beautifully terms "the harvest of a quiet eye." We see what we bring the power to see. And hence descriptive poetry of an elevated order is unpopular.

People do care for scenery in a general way. Therefore, Scott's descriptions are not unpopular, nor were those of Thomson before him. As a rule, they describe the surface and general look of things with accuracy, and in Scott's case with a good eye for broad effects. There is even an unrealized influence of scenery upon the uncultured, especially on mountaineers. But the great majority, who give a passing glance at the landscape, can scarcely understand that rapt contemplation of Nature, which is as the long look of a lover. And when these are called on to translate elaborate word-pictures, not only into their visual equivalents, but even into some spiritual imagery begotten in the poet from his intimate familiarity with Nature, it is as if a man born blind were called upon to realize a scene.

And how can this be poetry for after dinner, or for reading in an express train? The man makes you think too in all sorts of ways! He has a meaning—thoughts of his own—and his own way of putting them, moreover. It is a kind of thing that "no fellow" of either sex can be expected to put up with, or care for! Away with a poet who makes upon us such demands! We turn, with what relief, to the last exciting novel from Mudie's. But to the elect, how dear in all ages will such a poet be! The shy, subtle, delicate emotion, the ever-varying play of fine evanescent expression on the face of Nature, few, indeed, have noted with the same loving fidelity. Byron

is great when he interprets her large, massive effects, her sublime and stormy language, in harmony with his own moods, but his touch is coarse, and his colour crude in comparison with those of his rival. Coleridge came near him, and the landscapes of Shelley and Keats, but they are hardly of the earth.

“Such gentle mists as glide
Curling with unconfirmed intent
 On that green mountain side.”

“Over his own sweet voice the stockdove *broods*.”

“The swan on still St. Mary’s lake
 Floats double, swan and shadow.”

“His voice is buried among trees,
 But to be come at by the breeze.”

And those exquisite lines on the green linnet:—

“There! Where the flutter of his wings
 Upon his back and body flings
 Shadows and sunny glimmerings,
 That cover him all over,
 While thus before my eyes he gleams,
 A brother of the leaves he seems.”

But when I say that Wordsworth *spiritualizes* Nature, do not suppose I mean that he puts into her what is not there! A lover is the only person who sees his mistress truly. When he is disappointed, it is because cloudy storms have drifted over her true self, and that is hidden from view, or because his own eye is dulled. Only a loving eye can see. Transfiguration by love! What is it but revelation of the hidden truth? As I have already said, the meditative rapture of Wordsworth and Shelley passes at times into a kind of mystic disembodiment. The poet seems caught up into some third heaven, where the boundaries of sense are confounded, and our poor earth-language falters—

“With the burden of an honour,
 Unto which she was not born.”

There is nothing of this in Chaucer, Goldsmith, or Gray,

and less of it even in the great imaginations of Shakespeare or Milton. This difference belongs rather to the age than to the man. Landscape of old was a background, hardly a friend, still less, one passionately adored, or an apocalyptic symbol. In our recent great poets of Nature, there is an element we may call *Pantheism*. The soul of Nature is as distinctly felt and recognized as it was in the old-world religions of Polytheism, though, in accordance with our modified religion and philosophy, the expression of this takes a different form. With Keats the gods verily live again. He is a mythopœist. And even the Tory author of "Ecclesiastical Sonnets" passionately exclaims that he "would rather be a Pagan suckled in a creed outworn, if he might have glimpses that should make him less forlorn; and hear old Triton blow his wreathed horn." With the shattering of the hard orthodox conceptions of an unspiritual Christianity at the Renaissance, which culminated in the Revolution, and the substitution for them of a pseudo-scientific and soulless materialism, there heaved in poetic souls a revulsion toward more ancient faiths, which had discerned a Divinity not apart from, but pervading, the very life and substance, alike of humanity, and external Nature. And though Wordsworth was more or less orthodox in creed, yet in the presence of Nature, aye, and of the great facts of human life, his spirit refuses to be fettered by any rigid dogmas whatsoever. He felt, he saw—he little cared to understand. In such "access of high moods," even "the imperfect offices of prayer and praise" were transcended; "thought was not; in enjoyment it expired."

I have said that Wordsworth represents chiefly the effect and influence of Nature on poetic souls. Of course he must. But that is not altogether so. In "Peter Bell" a rude nature begins to be regenerated by the external scene it had formerly despised. There is always a danger of a poet's imputing himself to others. But nothing can

be more lovely and true than the poem commencing "Three years she grew," where the insensible influence of Nature in moulding a beautiful, innocent young girl's character is celebrated in such sweet song :—

"Beauty born of murmuring sound
Shall pass into her face.

"She shall be sportive as the fawn
That, wild with glee, across the lawn
Or up the mountain springs ;
And hers shall be the breathing balm,
And hers the silence and the calm
Of mute insensate things.

"The floating clouds their state shall lend
To her, for her the willow bend,
Nor shall she fail to see
Even in the motions of the storm
Grace that shall mould the maiden's form
By silent sympathy."

There are many "silent poets," only "lacking the art and accomplishment of verse." Those who possess that indeed often lack the far more essential poet's heart ; and these are far less truly *poets* than are those "silent ones." The "finest natures," Wordsworth tells us, "are often those of whom the noisy world hears least." What happy sympathies and sensibilities are implied in such words as these :—

"It is my faith that every flower
Enjoys the air it breathes.

"The budding twigs spread out their fan,
To catch the breezy air,
And I must think, do all I can,
That there was pleasure there."

"Then dearest maiden, move among these shades
In gentleness of heart ; with gentle hand
Touch—for there is a spirit in the woods."

If such refinement of feeling adds to pain as well as to pleasure, at all events it unbrutalizes and uplifts. In the Margaret of "The Excursion" we find first noted the

tokens of sympathy which Nature may give with a deep human sorrow, in the neglect and disorder that befell the once trim cottage garden of the poor woman, whose loving and beloved husband, her sole stay and support, has left her to enlist as a soldier, in consequence of overwhelming misfortune that befell both, and of whom, after long dreary suspense, she can gain no tidings ; a fellow-feeling to be noted also in the circumstance that those very sheep which fed upon the common now seemed to come unheeded and couch at her very threshold, for dull red stains and tufts of wool discoloured the corner stones of the cot ; but finally, when the listlessness and languor of hope long deferred have bowed their victim to the grave, we hear of the encouragement this same Nature may infuse in correction of a too hopeless despondency, for the poet traces "with interest more mild"—

"That secret spirit of humanity
Which 'mid the calm oblivious tendencies
Of nature, 'mid her plants and weeds and flowers
And silent overgrowings, still survived."

Having incidentally spoken much of Wordsworth in my first essay and elsewhere, I shall not say more here.

KEATS.

OUR theme is Adonais, one who deserves the name of "marvellous boy," fully as well as Chatterton, to whom Coleridge gave it, whose glorious extinguished youth may almost be characterized in that terribly pathetic sentence of an old dramatist—

" 'Tis not a life—
'Tis but a piece of childhood thrown away."

who desired that there might be inscribed on his grave—

" Here lies one whose name was writ in water."

Yet, as Shelley beautifully says—

" Ere the breath that could erase it blew,
Death, in remorse for that fell slaughter,
Death the immortalizing winter flew
Athwart the stream, and time's monthless torrent grew
A scroll of crystal, blazoning the name
Of Adonais."

Having re-read twice the little "Study" of my dear friend, the late Mrs. John Owen, on Keats, I have become convinced that she is, to a great extent at least, right; and to her certainly belongs the credit of being the first to see the deeper meaning that underlies the young poet's work, though, as she herself admits, but half-consciously. I have no doubt that the spiritual significance was but dimly present to the poet in "Endymion." It was characteristic of his youth at least, that he allowed his luxuriant fancy to overlay the central conception, whether that was fair

mythologic story only, or allegory also, with lush wreaths of episode and image, that assuredly make it almost impossible for a reader to determine it. Had this been otherwise, indeed, so many competent lovers of Keats would not have failed to recognize the unity, and main thought of the poem. It is entanglement within entanglement, very delicious, like tendriled mazes of a creeper, but wandering mazes, nevertheless. Certainly, there is much more articulated structure, and bony framework in "Hyperion," than in the earlier poems; a far more distinct vision, both spiritual and inventive. Mrs. Owen, indeed, admits that Keats was less consciously a teacher than Wordsworth. In fact, he saw imaginatively rather than intellectually. His vision was of concrete images, or living creatures, rather than abstractions. Only these are pregnant with a life more real and profound than that of the senses; yet because they are of the senses also, we may easily miss the soul in the body of them. This, however, is the distinctively poetic manner of vision.

He might, or might not have modified that profession of faith which has become celebrated, that "Beauty is Truth, and Truth Beauty." But he would hardly have thus expressed himself at all, if he had not been uttering a deliberate intellectual conviction. And the saying is capable of ample vindication. It is Platonic, if only you take into your conception elements not in themselves beautiful, but capable of being eventually harmonized with others into a higher ideal of beauty than were at all realizable without them. In fact, the full truth is concrete rather than abstract. It must be that which corresponds to all our faculties, not to one or two of them only. Hence, fuller vision is vision of the more rich, full, concrete, and alive. The perfectly developed spiritual Individualities are the truth, and this is the justification of our Lord's saying, "I am the Truth." But that the sensuous element was the most consummate in Keats can hardly be denied.

Mrs. Owen says, "the sensuous faculties are the first to be developed ; and in Keats they were developed to an unusual extent, probably by reason of the large scale of his whole nature ; for it must never be forgotten that his life was an arrested one, that his poetry remains to us a Titanic fragment of that which might have been the unrivalled work of genius of our age, and that the three small volumes of verse which he left us with the memory of his twenty-five years of life, are but a prelude to the music which never was played."

I shall indicate what, as it seems to me now, Mrs. Owen has justly discovered to be the leading thought in "Endymion," before passing to the particular beauties of detail in the poetry—which are assuredly the most characteristic feature of it—after a word on the mythology of "Hyperion."

Mrs. Owen dwelt particularly on a letter, which she quotes in full, from Keats to his friend, Mr. Reynolds, in 1818, as proving that Keats, like all greater poets, was seer as well as singer. And in the early verses, entitled "Sleep and Poetry," he clearly indicates that his own conception of what was needed for high poetry was, indeed, in accordance with that of his commentator.

The leading thought, then, of "Endymion" is the unity of life. Cynthia is the ideal mistress, Love and Beauty, whom Endymion, through so many wanderings, adventures, and vicissitudes, seeks and, at last, finds—

" He ne'er is crowned with immortality,
Who fears to follow where airy voices lead."

The prophesying is of the ideal beauty, which shall comprise not only the beauty already realized, but even the seeming ugliness and loss, and which will have had fused into its glowing splendour all reality. Through suffering only, and through sympathy with suffering, can this perfection of vision be attained. Endymion, in the deep ocean-world, rouses the dead lovers ; and by this Mrs.

Owen understands that he lays the spell of his trust in eternal love and beauty on the cold, dead hearts, and shut eyes of his brothers and sisters; then is heard the voice of harmony; then do they spring to one another, whose love has been not dead, but sleeping. Yet now he finds a new love, a dark princess, and in finding her Endymion loses sight of his ideal, contenting himself with a limited apprehension of real beauty, and becoming blind to all beyond. The soul that is absorbed in the external, or in one phase of an object, becomes untrue to higher aspirations, and a great bewildering unrest fills it. The ideal fades, and disbelief in that supernal loveliness succeeds: "I have clung to nothing, nothing seen, or felt but a great dream."

"There never lived a mortal man, who bent
His appetite beyond his natural sphere,
But starved and died. Caverns lone, farewell!
And air of visions, and the monstrous swell
Of visionary seas! No, never more
Shall airy voices cheat me to the shore
Of tangled wonder!"

But if he contents himself with life as it is, he is lost. Yet, at the end of all, the Indian Princess herself turns to him with the very face and aspect of Cynthia, his soul's beloved—for in reverting to the ideal love, even the lower beauty of the senses shall ultimately find true fulfilment and realization, since the higher involves, is, and constitutes the lower, however that may seem to be lost and sacrificed for awhile. But is it not, then, also necessary to know and love that lower princess, I wonder?

If "Endymion" be a parable of the development of the individual soul, "Hyperion" refers to the evolution and progress of the world. Hyperion, the Titan god of the sun, must be dethroned by Apollo, the Olympian, as exceeding him in worth and beauty; "yet he himself should live in his very successor, should indeed be fulfilled and perfected in him, his ethereal presence passing into

other forms, and living eternally, though heaven and earth might pass away." The very fine speech of Oceanus in the council of the gods is really conclusive proof that we have all mistaken in holding Keats to have no grasp of philosophical problems, young as he was, and not to have embodied some solution of them in his poetry :—

" So on our heels a fresh perfection treads,
A power more strong in beauty born of us,
And fated to excel us, as we pass
In glory that old darkness."

What profound practical wisdom is summed in the lines :

" Now comes the pain of truth, to whom 'tis pain.
O folly ! for to bear all naked truths,
That is the top of sovereignty."

Again, "Receive the truth, and let it be your balm." But there is also a passage in "Endymion," which I had noted long since, and which might have convinced me that my friend was right, and we had all been wrong. It contains vital truth, indeed, perhaps the very last word to be said in philosophy, though expressed in poetic language. The beauty and use in Nature is here declared to be dependent on the kisses of human lovers.

After illustrating yet a little further the conception of "Hyperion," and the original myth, I shall turn to individual beauties of the two longer poems, and then touch some of the shorter. The "Hymn to Pan" affords evidence of the freshness of individual conviction with which Keats reconstructed and vivified anew the conceptions of Greek mythology, even though he could not read the original Greek. But Nature to him was so verily alive and spiritual that, when he read about the worship of Nature in Greek poets, he understood them, and with enthusiasm embraced their idea ; for him, indeed, Proteus did rise from the sea, and Triton did blow his wreathed horn. Scientific modes of thinking have provisional value ; they teach the reign of order, the beauty of law ; but Keats pretty plainly

expressed what he thought of these, when they were taken to be the ultimate truth of things, in his "Lamia :"—

" Do not all charms fly
At the mere touch of cold philosophy ?
There was an awful rainbow once in heaven ;
We know her woof, her texture ; she is given
In the dull catalogue of common things."

It is with the imagination, he says in a letter, that we grasp truth ; in other words, the ideal is truth ; the emotions, moral, æsthetic, and affectional, are concerned in the comprehension of the universe quite as much as the senses and understanding : while as communicating the sublimest, most delicious, and enchanting feelings to the human heart adapted to receive them, Nature surely must herself be spiritual, not material, or rather the material must be spiritual if truly apprehended. Indeed the material may be proved philosophically to be only an ideal construction in and through the spirit comprehending it ; it is also a symbol of profounder and more vital reality ; so that Nature, as external to us, must be spiritual power, or powers. And is not that very much what the Greeks meant by gods ? But man, though not necessarily higher in the scale of creation than the powers of Nature, when adequately comprehended, is assuredly higher than those powers, regarded either as "fetish," vaguely alive, with the infantile savage, or as mechanical forces with the modern man of science. The change and succession in the dynasties of gods, according to the Greek, and other mythologies, may therefore represent a progress in our—in the human—conception of Divinity. Nature, as it appears to most of us, is inferior to man ; man is the more worshipful. And, therefore, to assimilate the Divine powers at the root of Nature, to the Greek, or Olympian type of manhood, is to advance on the conception of them as Titanic, comparatively blind, elemental, dim, vast, and shadowy, however potent. But does not man make this advance in proportion as he himself

makes progress in moral, emotional, and intellectual character? Moreover, man seems to be manifested on the stage of the world chronologically later than external Nature—presents himself, indeed (so our men of science now say), as evolved from inorganic elements, from earth, water, fire, through lower vegetable and animal lives, his more immediate progenitors. And may not this correspond to another and primary evolution in the heavenlies, or unseen sphere? Some such idea seems to be expressed in the noble speech of Oceanus. After all, humanity is the highest we know; we can know nothing else. Our notion of animal and vegetable, even of the inorganic realm, is but formed, if you will consider closely, by a subtraction from the human True, we can dimly imagine something higher than man as he is now, but only by taking hints from men and women as they are in their highest and best moments, in their noblest and most illustrious examples. And that is but to conceive an ideal of the highest possibilities of Divine humanity. Hence, the Greek conception was not final. Physical loveliness, courage, serene tranquillity, sensuous life, scorn, pride, power, are but transitional characteristics, comparative virtues, of a grand superior race; as of Epicurean gods, also, whom those races worship. Yet this religion was a justifiable Anthropomorphism, if indeed the very essence of Nature herself must be human; but if this were not so, we could have no knowledge, comprehension, or sympathy with Nature at all. Whereas, she is, indeed, our mother, and we her children; she is the all-containing, all-nourishing parent. Certainly, then, she is human, as well as divine.

The idea of Christ, however, was more divine than that of Pan, or Apollo, as the Olympian was more divine than the Titan. Hence the cry went forth in the hearing of those mariners in the Ægean, "Pan is dead! great Pan is dead!" Yet Pan, or universal Nature, still lived; the idea of her was, indeed, much nearer consummation in Jesus

Christ, His Divine Humanity being far nearer to the very fact of Nature ; though the pagan thought—toward which there was so eager a recoil in Julian, and Hypatia, at the mediæval Renaissance, and now again in the neo-paganism of our own Nature-worship, and care for bodily beauty—may need and receive conciliation with the Christian in a yet profounder apocalypse, or coming again of the Christ, or Divine Word ; for Nature is infinite, as well as sacred, ever removing boundaries, and inspiring her votaries through genius. It may be that low, inferior orders of intelligence—part and parcel of the Kosmic system—are really dethroned from human allegiance, while higher orders succeed them in authority over us, as we ourselves advance ethically and intellectually ; but they themselves are not unconcerned in securing for the human race such advancement. The Orb of Day is a grand, sensible phenomenon, producing innumerable benefits, nay, the very life and heart of our visible system ; but to the spiritual mystery thereof who has penetrated ? The Sun is the outward body, worshipped by many races and epochs ; but he expresses to them a very different influence and idea according to their own intellectual and moral condition. That is true, indeed, of every visible religious symbol, or worshipped personality. The Mary, or Christ, of the Abruzzi brigand, of the inquisitor, is not the Mary, or Christ, of Madame Guyon, the Curé d'Ars, Fletcher of Madeley, or Melancthon. What divine character we are capable of apprehending and living up to, that is the vital question ; not what name we may chance to give some mean religious conception, which is but an idol after all. Now and again Apollo dethrones the Titan, who becomes henceforth a Satan, an evil adversary. So the Christians called the pagan divinities devils. However, it seems probable that these wars of the gods point also to the wars of rival races, severally under the protection of rival gods : for instance, those of Zeus and the Titans may indicate the strife of the Hellenes with those ancient

inhabitants, who built the Cyclopean walls of Tiryns and Mycenæ ; but, then, this may indeed have involved an actual contest between principalities and powers—invisible tutelary deities, and guardians of these races. For evidently the nation is gathered round the altar of the tribal god. This may indeed be some ancestor, or hero. But are such essentially different from gods of nature, if such there be? Not necessarily, if Shelley was justified in affirming, “he is made one with Nature ;” and do not souls come forth from what we name Nature into human birth?

Verily “we receive but what we give.” Nature is ever formed in our image. And in proportion to our own stature does the stature of Nature appear to us. The music of universal reason can only utter itself according to the organ and the chord. The green, teeming, blossoming mother Earth is verily Cybele, Demeter, Isis, Hertha ; the warm, radiant, creative, overflowing, orgiastic energy of the world is Dionysos, Pan, and the corresponding receptive feminine element is Aphrodite ; the Orb of Day is Hyperion, Apollo ; that innumerable sea-smile is from the glad heart of Oceanus, or Oceanides ; Oread and Hamadryad whisper in woodland leaves ; ruffled lakes are lustrous with luminous looks of nymph or naiad ; the Corybantic, Dithyrambic impulse of Bacchic Mænad is crossed, bound in law, and wrought to harmony by the grave innocence, high wisdom, severe serenity of holy natures, represented by Ourania, Melpomene, or Athena.

For an idealist ought to believe that these ideas or aspects are not really abstractions, at least, in their essential nature, but may well be distinctively and peculiarly characteristic of certain concrete spiritual individualities with wider scope and influence than our own, concealed from us, yet involving, ensphering, dominating both ourselves and the world, even as the cells of our body are ordered and dominated by the Idea of our human organism. I have sometimes thought the truth may be a hierarchy

of spirit, one higher and wider sphere comprehending another, like Chinese ivory balls, if only these were able to interpenetrate and communicate. We ourselves help to form the order of Nature by our innate moulds of thought and sense; but there is something in her beyond this, external to ourselves; only that cannot be blind, dead matter. It must be conscious spirit in harmony with ours. What is this, then, but gods, or angels, who have the rule over, and peculiar commerce with certain departments, or elements we name Nature, whose thought, emotion, imagination, sense, together with our own human reason, verily and indeed constitute these kingdoms? For what are they, if not thought? Even the idiosyncrasy of men is in more special harmony with certain animals, and certain natural elements or kingdoms than with others, as Jacob Behmen has already observed, some with water, some with air, some with earth, some with fire, and some with ether, or stars, according to temperament or complexion. So also there are "principalities and powers" of light and love, balanced by principalities and powers of hate and darkness, the higher heavenly Eros, and the wanton Cupid, Uranian and Pandemian Aphrodite, angel and devil, the one very shadow, mocking mimic, and impish counterpart of the other. All Avatars are double, say the Druses. Thus Jesus evokes His adversary, Satan, Eros his Anteros; so that the latter typifies, exists through, and is even capable of transformation into the other. Thus it is equally credible that gods, or angels, or saints, inferior dignities, have authority also over the various departments of human affairs, and over particular races; neither necessarily to the prejudice of our own liberty, unless we, or our ancestors have either yielded it, or have not yet attained thereto from a condition of moral nonage, or moral infancy, nor to that order of fixed law, which natural and psychological science has discovered. For such an order of fixed law is always an order of thought and reason,

whether in our own minds, or in the external world of objects. Now, the laws of reason are in the nature of things permanent, necessary, and harmonious throughout the many and various provinces of intelligent existence, having their root and substance in the eternal, spiritual intuition of that Divine Being, who is one with all. So much, perhaps too digressively, has been said concerning the general idea involved in the myth of "Hyperion," hewn into so grand a torso-poem by Keats.

And now turn to some individual beauties. The opening lines of "Endymion," "A thing of beauty is a joy for ever," I need scarcely quote, they are so well known, their beauty so unquestionable and allowed.

In the succeeding paragraph we may note the poet's skill in clothing with concrete beauty the most abstract idea, here, that of *distance* :—

"And now as deep into a wood as we
Might mark a lynx's eye, there glimmered light,
Fair faces, and a rush of garments white."

The suggestion of the lynx's eye being eminently in harmony with the objects actually visible, and the wood in which they became so.

Thus again, in "Lamia" we have—

"On the moth-time of that evening dim."

And once more—

"There she stood,
About a young bird's flutter from a wood."

Of the paragraph succeeding, the opening is especially happy for variety of pause, choice of phrase, and felicitous arrangement of vowel-sound :—

"Leading the way, young damsels danced along,
Bearing the burden of a shepherd's song,
Each having a white wicker, overbrimmed
With April's tender younglings; next, well trimmed,
A crowd of shepherds, with as sunburnt looks
As may be read of in Arcadian books."

Passing over the exquisite description of Adonis in his

bower, where he has been put to sleep by Venus, and is carefully tended by the little loves (Adonis the Sun, and his sleep Winter), we come to the waking of Adonis by the descent of Venus—(or Love awakening Nature ; here Adonis is rather the beautiful Earth, young with spring-time)—Venus in her car drawn by doves, “with silken traces lightened in descent”—first, her silver car-wheels spinning off a drizzling dew, that “fell chill on soft Adonis’ shoulders, making him nestle, and turn uneasily about ;” then the goddess “leaning downward open-armed”—

“Her shadow fell upon his breast, and charmed
A tumult to his heart, and a new life
Into his eyes.”

What a delightful description of Spring !—

“Then there was a hum
Of sudden voices, echoing, Come, come !
Arise, awake, clear summer has forth walked
Unto the clover sward, and she has talked
Full soothingly to every nested finch.”

The short description of Cybele is also most pictorial ; nor am I going to defend this from the criticism of Lessing, that poetry should not be pictorial, for I have spoken of this elsewhere. I am strongly convinced that all great poetry has been so, and will be. There is another beautiful expression a little further—

“To his capable ears
Silence was music from the golden spheres.”

And this, as describing the bottom of the sea, or some shadowy sea-cave—

“One faint eternal eventide of gems.”

It must, however, be confessed that there is a great deal in this poem most crude, even affected, and in bad taste ; there are conceits, occasional ugliness of expression, and wanton liberties taken with the language. What can be worse than where Endymion calls his lady love’s lips “slippery blisses ?” All this belonged to the “cockney school” of Leigh Hunt,

though it was soon left behind. So far the abominable creatures who embittered the already too short and bitter days of Keats were not entirely without justification, as, indeed, what abuse, or abomination, is altogether wanting in fair excuses? In Keats' early poems there was much that ought not to have passed unreprieved by a judicious and sympathetic censor. But, then, these bloodhounds either were, or pretended to be, blind to all the positive and salient original merits of the boy-poet; his originality, however, was almost their justification—for mediocrity must ever misapprehend that; it has no palate or discernment of its own; merit for it must be labelled legibly with the approbation of past times, or present, publicly proclaimed "meritorious" by the general voice, or, better still, by the shrill consent of their own puny clique, before these Laura Bridgemans of æsthetic can distinguish its savour from demerit; and yet such are too frequently the afflicted creatures who offer themselves as caterers, and literary tasters for the public! Read the "Cobwebs of Criticism" by Mr. Hall Caine, if you wish to know what the most pretentious censors of their day said, and refrained from saying (the "conspiracy of silence") about all the poets without exception, around whose brow posterity has entwined the bay, and how they beslavered pretentious nonentities long since consigned to everlasting obscurity.

These things tried, after their kind, to stifle one full throat of song, as if song were too common. Let their memories be dragged for a moment from that darkness, which is only not a sink of infamy, because it is a pit of oblivion, for one passing spurn from the foot of scorn, and then *non ragionam di lor', ma guarda, e passa!* We do but haul them from their grave, to kick them into it again. Posterity reversed their verdict, and though they could deprive the poet of his "porridge," they could not cancel the fact that he did "fish the murex up," and that was the essential for *him*.

A noble, picturesque lyric is the "Triumph of Bacchus;"

the scene is all before you—worthy of a place beside that glorious lyric of Redi, "Bacchus in Tuscany." But now let us turn again to "Hyperion." Byron said it was "inspired by the Titans, and sublime as Æschylus." "Hyperion" assuredly is one of the grandest word-torsos in the language. In it blank verse has attained consummate dignity, though certainly it owes something to Milton, as "Endymion" does to Spenser, Browne of the "Pastorals" and Elizabethan Masques.

But what poet does not owe much to his predecessors? Keats was, however, one of the truly original generative powers of that great harvest-time of English poetry. The debt of Tennyson to him is incalculable. The invention and imagination of "Hyperion" are of the highest order. The opening picture is noble, and strikes the key-note worthily:—

"Deep in the shady sadness of a vale,
Far sunken from the healthy breath of morn,
Far from the fiery noon, and eve's one star,
Sat grey-haired Saturn, quiet as a stone,
Still as the silence round about his lair;
Forest on forest hung about his head,
Like cloud on cloud. . . .
Along the margin-sand large footmarks went
No further than to where his feet had strayed,
And slept there since. Upon the sodden ground
His old right hand lay nerveless, listless, dead,
Unsculptured; and his realmless eyes were closed,
While his bow'd head seemed listening to the earth,
His ancient mother, for some comfort yet."

Note the splendid phrase "realmless," as supremely imaginative, and expressing the whole situation in a word. A few lines on occurs the line, which has been elevated to the dignity of proverbial quotation—

"O how frail
To that large utterance of the early gods!"

Then there is the extremely beautiful forest similitude which haunts us ever after in all forest depths—

"As when upon a tranced summer night,
Those green-robed senators of mighty woods,

Tall oaks, branch-charmed by the earnest stars,
 Dream, and so dream all night without a stir,
 Save from one gradual solitary gust,
 Which comes upon the silence and dies off,
 As if the ebbing air had but one wave."

Worthy of the greatest poets is the vague suggestion of awful portents in the sun-palace of Hyperion before his fall. And how fine the characterization of Saturn's address commencing with the sonorous lines—

"There is a roaring in the bleak-grown pines,
 When Winter lifts his voice"—

a line further on repeated with great effect, the r's, and the large open vowel-sounds giving some of the audible effect of wind among pines.

That picture of the dethroned, and forlorn Titans is also great—

"Scarce images of life, one here, one there,
 Lay vast and edgeways ; like a dismal cirque
 Of Druid stones upon a forlorn moor,
 When the chill rain begins at shut of eve
 In dull November, and their chancel vault,
 The heaven itself, is blinded throughout night."

But the opening of Book III., concerning the coming of Apollo, or rather his awakening to a consciousness of his own native dignity and lordly function as very destined sun-god, alone worthy to assume royal insignia, and wield imperial thunder, is perhaps most beautiful of all. There is here an indefinable, unfathomable magic, and witchery of words. They are indeed, as Leigh Hunt says, "Swan-like, in love with the progress of their own beauty." The cadence of them, the vowel-harmony, pauses, felicitous phrase, clear, luminous picture, with all its beauty of god-like form, and delicious concordant scene, combine to poetry most exquisite indeed. The reticence and reserve, too, of the passage as compared to the treatment in *Endymion*, show that the poet, though so young, was already mature:—

"Throughout all the isle
 There was no covert, no retired cave

Unhaunted by the murmurous noise of waves,
Though scarcely heard in many a green recess.
He listened and he wept, and his bright tears
Went trickling down the golden bow he held.
Thus with half-shut, suffused eyes he stood,
While from beneath some cumbrous boughs hard by,
With solemn step an awful goddess came."

"And there was purport in her look for him,
Which he with eager guess began to read,
Perplex'd, the while melodiously he said,
'How camest thou over the unfooted sea?'"

Note the happy word "purport" here, and the accurately pictorial "cumbrous boughs." Delicious the mere sound of the lines commencing "Perplex'd, the while."

These gods and goddesses are so realized through the poet's sensitive perception and spiritual interpretation of Nature herself, of whom they are the animate and appropriate expression, that we are almost bound to believe in them; they are so much the soul, essence, and inevitable denizens of the scenes and surroundings in the midst of which we find them. Keats was the born mythopœist of these later days, Landor being rather a colder, though, indeed, as to external form, a more classical reproducer of ancient tales, and fair humanities of old religion. But Keats was the more unfettered in this function from the fact of his attitude being one of comparative detachment from the distinctive religious beliefs, as also equally from the negations of his day and generation. He had a positive faith, but very little formulated creed, or formulated antagonism to the established creed. The other great poets, his contemporaries, were Nature-worshippers also; only with him this cult presented itself invested with the beautiful and delicate forms of Greek mythology. I do not say that his own belief was precisely that of Greece; yet, when he was poetically inspired, it was not essentially different, allowing for the difference of his age and education, and for that melancholy yearning toward the infinite, which is Christian and modern. The Greeks were mere

charming story-tellers, not allegorical, and moral at all ; and so far, no doubt, our Keats was not Greek.

Through strange suffering, wonder, bewilderment, and convulsion, which makes "Quiver all the immortal fairness of his limbs," does Apollo ("most like the struggle at the gate of death"), grow into his inheritance of glory, and then the wondrous fragment breaks off abruptly.

Now turn to the lesser poems. "Lamia" and "Isabella" are admirably-told stories, and there is no excess in the manner over the matter, all which promised excellently for a future that never arrived—at least, on this earth of ours. "Lamia" is clearly allegorical, or at least representative of wider issues. It means passion, or impulse *versus* reason, or philosophy. And here, again, we have the extraordinary power of realizing the primitive mythological modes of thought and feeling, notably in the transformation of the serpent into the woman. These fairy, or "astral" regions, are as palpable to Keats as the solid, visible world is to any of us ; tinged they are indeed with the Gothic, or mediæval romance-feeling, that weird inflexion, which is notable also in Coleridge, in the "Ancient Mariner," and "Christabel." In "Isabella" we have the charming fancy—

"Come down, we pray thee, ere the hot sun count
His dewy rosary on the eglantine !"

And this brief imaginative touch of genius in a phrase, which shows the great poet—

"So the two brothers and their murdered man
Rode past fair Florence."

"Murdered" already, so inevitably had Death branded him for slaughter. And then the pathos of the line—

"There in that forest did his great love cease."

The lamentation of the poor lover's ghost, who appears to Isabella in vision, is exquisitely pathetic too.

The lovely poem, "Eve of St. Agnes," is one of those

best known. What a Shakespearian, and startling unexpectedness of phrase is here :—

“Sudden a thought came like a full-blown rose,
Flushing his brow, and in his pained heart
Made purple riot.”

For magic of epithet, so utterly alien to the cold ingenuities and conceits of the false and vicious fantastic school, it is not easy to rival Keats out of Shakespeare, once he has outgrown the bad taste which disfigured the lush prodigality of “*Endymion*.” His vocabulary is extraordinarily wealthy and varied for so very young a man. The luscious richness of his description cannot be better illustrated than by those two stanzas from this poem, wherein the lover, Porphyro, views the beloved maiden in her chamber. The poem ends with just a touch of that pathos, so full of human-heartedness, which is also one of the traits that makes Keats beloved :—

“And they are gone ; aye, ages, long ago,
These lovers fled away into the storm.”

It is really impossible to exaggerate the debt of Tennyson's style to this poem.

The “*Ode to Psyche*” shows excellently well that so characteristic trait, the soul of the Greek turning as naturally to that bright and beautiful mythology in the young son of the London livery-stableman as in any fair poet of Hellas, nurtured in her delicate air. Thus Chatterton, too, lived in the illumined world of mediæval romance, how much more truly than in those dingy streets of modern Bristol ! Only here there is a tender regret for the old days. Exquisite are the personifications in the “*Ode to Autumn*,” and these are precisely what we should expect from so mythopœic a soul. Of all the poems of Mrs. Browning, delightful as many of them are to me, the one I care for least is her answer to Schiller's “*Götter Griechen-lands*,” commencing “*Gods of Hellas*.” It seems to me that the mistaken sentiment of that poem finds for itself a righteous Nemesis

in the slovenly rhymes of it—"Gods of Hellas, will you tell us?" But then she wrote another poem called "Pan," later in life, whose beauty, and truth of mythological personification almost atone for the one called "The Dead Pan."

Remember that crowned personification of the "Ode to Melancholy"—

"And Joy, whose hand is ever at his lips,
Bidding adieu."

In his "Sleep and Poetry," an early work, Keats tells us what in his view was the chief end of poetry—

"Forgetting the great end
Of Poesy, that it should be a friend
To soothe the cares, and lift the thoughts of man."

While, a few lines further, he says—

"They shall be accounted poet-kings,
Who simply tell the most heart-easing things."

Not a pessimist this Keats, nor a mere sensualist either. And he concludes the clause with the line so fraught with sadness to us who know the event—

"O may these joys be ripe before I die!"

There is a beautiful sonnet to the sea, and one containing a strange—to me, very fascinating—image concerning the sea :—

"The moving waters at their priest-like task
Of pure ablution round earth's human shores."

Of "La Belle Dame sans merci" Mr. Watts has well spoken; to it Mr. G. Rossetti is largely indebted. It is mediæval. Some noble sonnets were also written by the young poet. "On first looking into Chapman's Homer" is one of the finest.

And now, in conclusion, we pass to the two loveliest of Keats' shorter poems—two that have their calm celestial

faces set steadily toward immortality—the “Ode on a Grecian Urn,” and the “Ode to a Nightingale.”

The “Ode on a Grecian Urn” wonderfully enshrines the poet’s kinship with Greece, and with the spirit of her worship. There is all the Greek measure and moderation about it also ; a calm and classic grace, with severe loveliness of outline. In form it is perfect. There is an exquisiteness of expression—not that which is often mistakenly so designated, but a translucence, as of silver air, or limpid water, that both reveals and glorifies all fair plants, or pebbles, or bathing lights.

In the “Ode to a Nightingale,” how admirable are those abstractions of the second stanza!—

“O for a draught of vintage that hath been
Cool’d a long age in the deep-delved earth,
Tasting of Flora, and the country-green,
Dance, and Provençal song, and sun-burnt mirth !
O for a beaker full of the warm South,
Full of the true, the blushful Hippocrene,
With beaded bubbles winking at the brim,
And purpled-stained mouth.

“That I might drink, and leave the world unseen,
And with thee fade away into the forest dim.”

What poetic genius is implied in the choice of such epithets ; how bold, yet felicitous the “tasting” of these things that yet cannot be “tasted”—but so blended are all sensations with memory, imagination, and the higher faculties, that we may scarcely discriminate what is appropriate to each when association sets off one image, and notion, and feeling after another, and fuses all into one ! And then “sun-burnt mirth”—how easily would an inferior talent pass the line of the ridiculous in attempting such periphrases ! But as Nelson, with the instinct of genius, at the battle of the Nile, knew that it was only just not impossible to pass between the enemy’s line of battleships and the shore, so here also, the not impossible in description has been divined and dared. Not that the best poet

can remain always at this altitude; sometimes even his often unerring intuition will fail him.

Whenever I enter a forest, this line haunts me—

“And with thee fade away into the forest dim.”

It is night, and the particular flower or fruit unseen that breathes so delicate an aroma, and so we have the beautiful generic “incense”—

“Nor what soft incense hangs upon the boughs.”

Again, note—

“To cease upon the midnight with no pain.”

Such periphrases, which are apt to brand a mere versifier indelibly with the brand of inferiority, if coined in cold blood, and with palpable design of drawing attention to the writer's own cleverness, are in Keats true inspirations of infinite delight.

“The same that oft times hath
Charmed magic casements, opening on the foam
Of perilous seas, in fairy lands forlorn.”

Here we seem altogether lost in some ethereal supermundane region of the phantasy, where all is intangible, indefinite, but wonderfully lovely—phrase, cadence, and image. But the inspiration of “*Ruth amid the alien corn*,” has a touch of human pathos, that causes the dim and fleeting generations to link hand with hand, and makes that delightful story of the Bible very near.

Yet with all this immense sense of the beauty and glory of life, of the world and its wonderful shows, he had known many a disappointment, and suffered much—love unfulfilled, malignant scorn, cold indifference, painful death near, and work half done; there was ever a melancholy yearning after some unrealized, unrealizable ideal; his vision of the infinite, beyond and beneath sense, deepened toward the close—

“I know this being’s lease ;
My fancy to its utmost blisses spreads ;
Yet would I on this very midnight cease,
And the world’s gaudy ensigns see in shreds.
Verse, form, and beauty are intense indeed,
But Death intenser—Death is Life’s high meed.”

How we love young Severn, his painter friend, who
nursed him like a woman in his last lingering illness and
agony !

In Shelley’s noble words—

“He lives, he wakes ; ’tis death is dead, not he !”

VICTOR HUGO.

Is he whom Tennyson calls "Victor in song, Victor in romance," indeed only a clever, but eccentric, and voluminous creator of monsters? That, though not the opinion of poets, seems to be the opinion of some critics, English and foreign. In the *Spectator*, a journal which, when it happens to be in sympathy with the work criticized, unquestionably shows insight, Hugo was lately characterized as colossal, but not great; and the dictum was hazarded that some reflective lines of "In Memoriam" were worth all he had written put together. That the present writer feels completely at fault when such statements are made, he freely confesses. He hears them as empty wind, without meaning; for, though not blind to the great poet's faults, and to all objections that may be urged against him, he is nevertheless disposed to regard Hugo as the greatest European poet of our century. The latest romance of this veteran of literature, "Quatre-vingt-treize," is surely enough to prove it. That a poet of Hugo's years should retain all the fire and intensity of youthful genius, while conquering for himself also the moderation and artistic restraint of maturity, is a phenomenon rare enough to be remarkable. We have not in "Quatre-vingt-treize" the lurid, concentrated, and often grotesque horror of some of the dramas, or of "L'Homme qui rit." Nor, on the other hand, have we the episodic and digressive voluminousness of that magnificent romance "Les Misérables."

It may be well, however, to premise that I have spoken advisedly of Hugo as a poet. Those among us who appear to regard poetry as rhythmic sound of a special and very elaborate sort, into which (unfortunately) some semblance of idea and feeling has, if possible, also to find its hindering way, such persons may demur to Hugo being called a poet. For I hold that some of his greatest poetic creations are in prose; and that if you want dainty devices of epithet and sound, you must rather go to mediæval troubadours and *trouvères*, to men like Marini or Baudelaire, or again, to sundry infusorial homologues of these in England and America. That the French language does not admit of melodious poetry indeed is a dictum of some critics to which I, who love Béranger, De Musset, and Ronsard, cannot subscribe. There is beauty, too, in the verse of Lamartine; it abounds, moreover, in that of Hugo. But by poets I mean imaginative creators, expressors of great imaginative types, or ideas in appropriate verbal form; or, again, singers with the heart's true lyrical cry. To those who hold the *Art for Art* theory Hugo can hardly seem a poet. He is one who, like Homer, Shakespeare, Æschylus, Dante, Milton, is lifted high in the sphere of art by stress and storm of great ideas and aspirations; he is in full sympathy with all the noblest ideals and tendencies of his time; to him there is in man and Nature nothing common or unclean; he is no bloodless spectre of study or studio, inventing, or adapting quaint *feux d'artifices* of syllabic euphony. He cannot understand that an artist must be indifferent to humanity, to religion, to politics, to moral and metaphysical problems; that an artist must work regardless of eternal distinctions in Nature, of high and low, good and bad, hideous and beautiful; or that art, which may distinguish between beautiful and ugly in the region of sense, must lose all such discrimination in dealing with the higher sphere of spirit. To him such a creed, whatever might be its advantages, would seem inhuman, inartistic, degraded, and absurd.

Let us then proceed to examine one or two of the *chefs-d'œuvres* of this poet. In "Quatre-vingt-treize" all is, on the whole, restrained within the classic limits of highest art. But some seem to suppose that for art to be classical it must be cold and pale. Hugo is certainly never that. And neither are any of the world's masterpieces. Not those of Homer, Æschylus, Sophocles, Sappho, Chaucer, Dante, Shakespeare, Milton, Shelley, Byron, Scott, Hawthorne, Charlotte Brontë, George Sand, Tennyson. If these poets had not high genius, they would be justly reproached as "sensational." Cold and pale works are either pseudo-classical imitations, or utterly insignificant as literature. Racine was a true poet with fine sense of form; but so far as he was cold and pale, he was not classical. David is cold, and pseudo-classical. Raphael, Michael Angelo, and Titian radiate life, fire, and colour from their canvas, true classics of pictorial art. Poor modern statues are very dead and cold; Apollo Belvedere, and Diana in the Louvre, are gods that breathe, and ever do undying deeds in stone. Death is pale, and cold, and rigid; but the touch of art makes alive! And life is all varying complexity of subtle curve and colour.

All this, of course, does not mean that there are not certain general laws valid for, and to be found in great art, whatever the variety of shapes it may assume. There is a more complex and subtle, but as real a pervading unity in a perfect Gothic cathedral like Salisbury as in the Pagan Parthenon of Athens. The vital variety and richness of detail may sometimes overpower the sense of unity; but this is a fault less grave than that the unity should be mechanical, dead, and barren, without vital variety to inform it. Indeed, while there is hope of perfection in the first case, there is no such hope in the last. Moreover, these beautiful artistic creations of detail, episode, and phrase, have organic unity of their own, or they would not be beautiful at all, although there be still wanting the

Divine breath to mould them into one consummate spirit. But the carvings and festoonings of marble and jasper, and oaken fruit or flower, the flamboyance of mullion, jewelled, dim radiance of silver lamp-lit shrine or altar, the high, solemn interfluence of dark pillared arches—all these may form high poetry, though the style of the whole cathedral be not absolutely one and harmonious. We admit the turbid, yet glorious faultiness of Hugo, as of Shakespeare, the rich, wavering, incompleated ascent of Gothic genius toward the twilight of infinity. But theirs is a splendid cathedral for all its imperfection. And however imperfect, however erring the worship, it is a fane dedicated to the true God; to Jesus Christ, His Son, our Lord. There men may worship the Father in spirit and in truth, according to the more or less light that is always vouchsafed to those who sincerely seek it. There may be perchance grotesque images of superstition; there may even be altars to the Unknown; but on the whole, the atmosphere and the ritual are Christian, elevated, advanced, and ennobling. There is nothing overtly, deliberately, debasing or impure; all the fair lines of the high arches ascend and marry far above our heads; the spaces are large and ample; we behold man in his heaven-helped progress toward the higher ideal of our Lord and Saviour, toward the coming of His kingdom, toward human brotherhood in One—the spirit of these ideas informs the highest art of Christian time, whether the artist's formal creed be strictly orthodox or not. Nay, it informs the iconoclasm of Hugo and Lamennais more than it does the orthodoxy of Chateaubriand, or Boileau. "Other foundation *can* no man lay than that *is* laid." But the poetry of despair, and materialism is in a temporary side-eddy merely; for the craze of scientific materialism is only that. In one sense it is doubtless part of the main stream; still the grand current trends elsewhere. And the *Ewigkeit-geist* views tranquilly these inevitable vagaries of the Time-spirit, his daughter.

Victor Hugo has written some splendid verse-poetry. But in this region he is perhaps more unequal, and falls more below himself, than in any other. Much of it is merely declamatory and rhetorical, as French verse is so apt to be. That is especially true of "L'Année Terrible." Yet you are never long without startling thrusts of genius in felicitous condensed epithet or line, that almost take away your breath with their memorable, incisive appropriateness and force. In "L'Année Terrible" we have these concluding lines respecting the surrender at Sedan:—

"Alors la Gaule, alors la France, alors la gloire,
Alors Brennus, l'audace, et Clovis, la victoire. . . .
Et tous les chefs de guerre,—Héristal, Charlemagne,
Charles Martel, Turenne, effroi de l'Allemagne,
Napoléon, plus grand que César et Pompée,
Par la main d'un bandit rendirent leurs épées."

And here we have also that exquisite poem about Hugo's little grandchild—"La Petite Jeanne"—written during the siege of Paris:—

"Et vous venez, et moi je m'en vais, et j'adore,
N'ayant droit qu'à la nuit, votre droit à l'aurore.
Votre blond frère George et vous, vous suffisez
A mon âme, et je vois vos jeux, et c'est assez ;
Et je ne veux, après mes épreuves sans nombres,
Qu'un tombeau, sur lequel se découpera l'ombre
De vos berceaux dorés par le soleil levant.

"Oh ! quand je vous entends, Jeanne, et quand je vous vois
Chanter, et me parlant avec votre humble voix,
Tendre vos douces mains au dessus de nos têtes,
Il me semble que l'ombre où grondent les tempêtes
Tremble, et s'cloigne avec des rugissements sourds,
Et que Dieu fait donner à la ville aux cents tours,
Deseparée ainsi qu'un navire qui sombre, . . .
A l'univers qui penche, et que Paris defend,
Sa bénédiction par un petit enfant."

There are beautiful things about children, too, in the great old poet's last volume of verse, "L'Art d'être Grand-père," notably "Jeanne endormie," and "Le Jardin des Plantes." In fact, he is never higher and more wonderful

than when writing about little children. The glory of the man's large, loving heart overflows whenever he beholds those innocents, whom the Lord took in His arms, and blessed with most peculiar blessing. And this is the writer of the scathing "Châtiments." "*F'ai fait peur aux petits hommes,*" he says in "*L'Art d'être Grandpère, 'jamais aux petits enfants.'*"

The design of the "Légende des Siècles" is grandiose, and there are some grand representative pictures in it, notably "Canute" and "Eviradnus." Certainly the canvases and designs of this master are colossal. He seems to demand vast spaces for the free sweep of his magic brush, nor can we always claim for him perfect delicacy of touch, and perfect refinement of taste. Still his vast pictures are akin rather to the colossal works of Michael Angelo, Tintoret, and Orcagna, than to the colossal works of Haydon, Cornelius, or Horace Vernet; for in the prose romances there is little, enormous as they are, that is not stamped with the impress of the master. And yet the execution in small things is sometimes delicate, with all the rare felicity of Heine, or De Musset. But the felicity is rather the unforeseen felicity of Nature, as in Burns and Béranger. This is the song of the dying and half-wandering girl, Fantine, longing to see her child before she dies, in "Les Misérables"—a cradle-song, that comes to her, dying, which she used to sing in happier days to her baby:—

“ Nous acheterons de bien belles choses,
 En nous promenant le long des faubourgs !
 Les bleuets sont bleus, les roses sont roses,
 Les bleuets sont bleus, j'aime mes amours.
 La vierge Marie auprès de mon poêle
 Est venue hier en manteau brodé,
 Et m'a dit : voici, caché sous mon voile,
 Le petit qu'un jour tu m'as demandé !
 Courez à la ville, ayez de la toile,
 Achetez du fil, achetez un dé !
 Nous acheterons de bien belles choses,
 En nous promenant le long des faubourgs !

" Bonne sainte viérge, auprès de mon poêle
 J'ai mis un berceau de rubans orné ;
 Dieu me donnerait sa plus belle étoile,
 J'aime mieux l'enfant que tu m'as donné.
 Madame, que faire avec cette toile ?
 Faites un trousseau pour mon nouveau né.
 Les bleuets sont bleus, les roses sont roses,
 Les bleuets sont bleus, j'aime mes amours.

" Lavez cette toile—ou ? Dans la rivière
 Faites en, sans rien gâter ni salir,
 Une belle jupe avec sa brassière,
 Que je veux broder et de fleurs emplir. . . .
 L'enfant n'est plus là ; Madame, qu'en faire ?
 Faites en un drap pour m'ensevelir !
 Nous achèterons de bien belles choses
 En nous promenant le long des faubourgs !
 Les bleuets sont bleus, les roses sont roses,
 Les bleuets sont bleus, j'aime mes amours."

Still, the cyclopean scale on which the master loves to work is most characteristic ; the breadth of his touch, the rapidity and profusion of his style—a profusion as of starry worlds ; a style resembling waves of the sea, sometimes, indeed, weltering dark, opaque, and massive, but ever and anon flashing with the foamy light of genius. The finish, and rich accurate perfection of our own great living poet, Tennyson, are absent. Hugo is far more akin to Byron, but his range is vaster than Byron's. He has Byron's fierce satire, and more than Byron's humour, though it is the fashion to generalize, and say that the French have none. To this point we shall return. He is both a lyrical and epic poet. He is a greater dramatist than Byron ; and whether in the dramas, or in the prose romances, he shows that vast sympathy with, and knowledge of, human nature, which neither Byron, Shelley, Coleridge, nor Wordsworth had. Scott could be his only rival. For in France they have lived dramatic lives for the last ninety years : we have lived much more quietly in England. And in France there is a real living drama.

We need not repeat the old story of Hugo's long battle

as champion of so-called Romanticism against the pseudo-classical Philistinism of academic prigs. In that battle he simply incarnated the genius of his age, emancipating itself from the fetters of simpering incapacity, masquerading in the guise of "correct taste." No capable person can deny the genius of Racine, Corneille, Voltaire, Beaumarchais. Still, Corneille was greater than Racine; yet the self-laureled, mumbling, official imbeciles of criticism, or puppies fresh from school, whom they hired as their bravoës, looked askance at Corneille, in proportion as his great limbs could not be confined within old-fashioned court uniforms, then officially prescribed for poets.

Voltaire was a power by the cold, keen, sparkling edge of his supple raillery and denial; Beaumarchais by the salt of life, and grace of humour that belonged to him. But none of these men travailed with the rich and sorrowful humanity of an art, whose creators had passed through tremendous fires of an epoch-marking age. In Germany, Goethe and Schiller, in France, two men and one woman, have since stood forth as far greater art-creators than either of them—namely, Victor Hugo, Balzac, George Sand. One solitary figure indeed, by sheer force of native genius, rose to equality with these, and with the greatest of all time—Molière. And one great writer before them foreshadowed the future—Rousseau. But these spirits of our epoch, like Byron, Shelley, Scott, Keats, and Wordsworth, in England, having fresh, original things to say, necessarily made for themselves a more or less original way of saying them. And such things originating in a deepened, broadened current of human life, as in a fuller comprehension of mankind than was possible to men of the corrupt, artificial, and exclusive, however nationally-stirring time of Louis-Quatorze—also in a heightened appreciation of external Nature—the new creators found themselves drinking at the deep, ever fresh, though ancient wells of Shakespeare and his contemporaries. Moreover,

they felt and saw in Greek poetry what they brought the power to feel and see ; that which their predecessors had no faculty for perceiving. Hence the imperious need to them, wrestling with great problems, palpitating with strange new prophecies and perceptions, of the large, free Shakespearian form in art.

We shall quote one or two instances of the master's satire from that tremendous book, "Les Châtiments." Here is a poem called "Confrontations :"—

"O cadavres, parlez ! quels sont vos assassins ?
 Quelles mains ont plongé ces stylets dans vos seins ?
 Toi d'abord que je vois dans cette ombre apparaître,
 Ton nom ?—Religion—Ton meurtrier ?—Le prêtre.
 Vous, vos noms ?—Probité, Pudeur, Raison, Vertu.
 Et qui vous egorgez ? L'Eglise—Toi, qu'es-tu ?
 Je suis la Foi publique—et qui t'a poignardée ?
 Le Serment—Toi, qui dors de ton sang inondée ?
 Mon nom était Justice—et quel est ton bourreau ?
 Le juge—et toi, géant, sans glaive en ton fourreau,
 Et dont la boue éteint l'auréole enflammée ?
 Je m'appelle Austerlitz. Qui ta tué ? L'armée.

"Ad majorem Dei gloriam" is fierce, scathing, annihilating as Swift, Juvenal, or Byron. It is an arraignment of the Church of Rome and her priests:—

"Nous garroterons l'âme au fond d'une caverne. . . .
 Alors dans l'âme humaine obscurité profonde !
 Sur le néant des cœurs le vrai pouvoir se fonde !
 Tout ce que nous voudrons, nous le ferons sans bruit.
 Pas un souffle de voix, pas un battement d'aile
 Ne remuera dans l'ombre, et notre citadelle
 Sera comme une tour plus noire que la nuit.
 "Nous regnerons. La tourbe obeit comme l'onde.
 Nous serons tout-puissants, nous régirons le monde
 Nous posséderons tout, force, gloire, et bonheur ;
 Et nous ne craindrons rien, n'ayant ni foi, ni règles. . . .
 Quand vous habiteriez la montagne des aigles,
 Je vous arracherais de là, dit le Seigneur !

To the dead of the fourth of December, he cries:—

"Grâce au quatre Décembre, aujourd'hui, sans pensée,
 Vous gisez étendus dans la fosse glacée,
 Sous les linceuls épais.

O morts, l'herbe sans bruit croît sur vos catacombes ;
 Dormez dans vos cercueils ! taisez-vous dans vos tombes !
 'L'Empire, c'est la paix.'

And again, every word of "Le Te Deum" is a thunderbolt. These are the two last verses, addressed to the priest who chanted the *Te Deum* of 1st January, 1852:—

"Ton diacre est Trahison, et ton sous-diacre est Vol :
 Vends ton Dieu, vends ton âme !
 Allons, coiffe ta mitre, allons, mets ton licol,
 Chante, vieux prêtre infâme !

"Le Meurtre à tes côtés suit l'office divin,
 Criant : feu sur qui bouge !
 Satan tient la burette, et ce n'est pas de vin
 Que ton ciboire est rouge."

"A un martyr" shows the poet's perfect reverence for our Saviour, while he slings syllables of fire at the Church, which accepted "the bandit" for its patron. It is, we think, in these brief eagle-swoops of fierce song that the sound of the poet's verse is most striking. It has the resonant, quick tramp of irresistible battalions. In "L'Homme à ri," and elsewhere, he reveals how he believes in the power, and survival for great ends of his own verse. And to those who fancy Hugo is always over-verbose, or invertebrate, we commend the "Châtiments," and the dramas. The former are short, swift, concentrated, and deadly as a flash of lightning. See the terrific severity, where every word tells, and none is merely for effect—a stern brief severity as of Conscience herself speaking—in "Sacer esto." But it is the loftiest moral indignation that burns and scalds in this poetry ; no feigned false fire of artificial rhyme-mongery. Warm, generous human blood is in this poet. Read "À un qui veut se détacher !"

In the dramas, however, you have also complete vital concentration. That they are justly open to other charges we think is true. They are sometimes French, rather than human—seeking too ostentatiously striking melodramatic situations, sometimes laying bare a horror that is too raw

and thrilling, sometimes revealing a Doré's love of the monstrous and grotesque. From this point of view some exception might be taken to "Marie Tudor," even to "Ruy Blas," "Hernani," and "Lucretia Borgia," three of the most powerful dramas. But the finest in my judgment are "Le Roi s'amuse" and "Marion Delorme." Yet the impression left by "Le Roi s'amuse" is too thrillingly horrible, like that of "Lucretia Borgia." Its power and fascination, however, can hardly be surpassed: indeed, the unity of motive and action in all Hugo's plays is generally perfect, and they are admirably fitted for the modern stage, their movement being rapid and stirring, the most minute directions also being given by the author for the *mise en scène*, with an admirable eye to pictorial and scenic effects. For reading, truly, the many startling surprises seem often too calculatedly theatrical. There is very little so-called "poetic diction" in the dramas; that is to be remarked: in the eyes of our neo-fantastic ornate school of decadence in England they must seem too natural, too direct, too human. All the personages do not talk the same sonorous euphuism. Hugo dares to write what penny-a-liners call "bald," when he sees it to be appropriate. Perhaps it may be partly owing to this that the naked realism of his horror sometimes shocks, as an equal horror does not in Shakespeare, whose fault, however, as Matthew Arnold has dared to say, is, though not of course to the same extent as in our modern writers, a somewhat indiscriminate euphuism of diction. For the most part, indeed, Shakespeare varies rhythm and diction with the situation, and sense. But there is a helpless wounding sense of cruel, overwhelming destiny for the good, and rampant, triumphant evil, in "Le Roi s'amuse," which prevents its attaining rank among the highest works of art. For we will not admit the new-fangled doctrine, that, so long as the form is good, the substance is of no consequence, and that art may say anything, however absurd, false, or atrocious, provided she says it prettily. Art falls below

herself, and unduly narrows her own scope, if she become a prude; yet if she distort Nature, or the grand spiritual laws that underlie and form Nature, she is no longer Art at all, but at best a harlot masquerading in the guise of Art. She may not so one-sidedly and persistently misrepresent things as virtually, even if not by set phrase, to become pander for "the ape and tiger" in humanity. The Divine Artist, who speaks through conscience and the human heart, does not ignore morality; he who does so remains for ever outside the domain of high art, however swiftly his deft fingers may travel over the whole gamut of men's lusts, hatreds, and chicaneries. Nor may she, like the later Realism, fix our stare, as by some photographic head-rest, too persistently on loathsome, or sordid details of life, bidding us look only at these, as if they, forsooth, were all the world—nor stifle us through her own near-sightedness, and mad monstrous appetite for offal, with the hopeless and desperate sense that this low dank vault of theirs, without egress, lit only by some occasional corpse-candle, wherein they have confined us, is indeed the universe, beyond which there is nothing at all. Yet I admit the great imaginative power of Zola. Art is a handmaid of heaven; and however solicitous her professed friends may be to obtain for her the situation, she respectfully declines to become procuress of hell. All this does not touch Hugo, though it was indirectly suggested by "*Le Roi s'amuse*." The subject of that play is briefly as follows. The gallant and handsome Francis I. has seduced the daughter of an old nobleman, and the hideous court dwarf, Triboulet, has encouraged this, as well as the rest of his master's vices, mocking openly the father's agony and tears. He is deformed in body and soul, and thus avenges himself on the more favoured fellow-mortals who cast him out. The father curses Triboulet; and it happens that he has one tender place, one link indeed to virtue and salvation, his own daughter. Now the king, who spares none, spares not

her. Triboulet keeps her carefully concealed from the king, but the latter finds her out, and corrupts her also. Then Triboulet burns with hatred against his master, and plots his destruction. He is to be lured into a *coupe-gorge* and murdered. The sister of the bravo, however, takes pity on the sleeping king, persuading her brother to murder the first comer instead, and to hand the body to Triboulet in a sack, as the object of his revenge. Now Triboulet's daughter loves her seducer, and overhearing this, she resolves to save the king at the cost of her own life. She is killed, and handed over to her father, who gloats over what he supposes to be the corpse of his child's betrayer. But a flash of lightning reveals to him the corpse of his child; and his maddened agony now, as before his bitterness, misery, fiendish rage, and satiate revenge are wonderfully depicted—as also the beautiful light cruelty of Francis. Yet we have a pained sense of innocence made victim, of the prosperous tyrant laughing on, of the consummation of nature's hatred wreaked on this deformed man, who might be redeemed, one had hoped, through this one love. True, the retribution on him for having scoffed at the other father is just, and one's hatred changes to pity. There is nothing *really* immoral here. This is the effect the poet intended; there is indeed hope even for this Triboulet, while there is retribution also. Certainly what is called "poetical justice" is an utterly mistaken contrivance; substituting our own shallow justice for God's—though even that has its justification in a healthy artistic as well as moral instinct. Moreover, it may be said there is the same oppressive sense of doom in "King Lear," or "Hamlet." Yet in Shakespeare there is, I think, a certain large air, a light and heat of essential poetry, that clears this atmosphere of oppression, we scarce know how. There is a palpable suggestion of infinite horizons beyond the slaughter-house of this world; a feeling conveyed, however indistinctly, of a holy Mystery that surrounds and sanctifies—this mortal scene being but

the antechamber of God's eternity. *The rest is silence*; but an awe falls upon us, and we put our shoes from our feet, for we stand upon holy ground. Around the sublime anguish of Lear and Cordelia there abides a dim, tranquil aureole, as around those piteous natural casts of distorted Pompeian corpses, when lately brought to light, there brooded the blue heaven, and warm, hazy horizons of Southern landscape. Such an impression, somehow, though nothing be overtly stated, can supreme genius give, so truly does it see even the bare fact. Over its nudity is cast the royal robe of Art. Hugo too often concludes with a terrible mad shriek of helpless anguish—a discord: the agony is too crude, too harrowing, too poignant. The emotions are hardly "purified;" they are only lacerated through "pity and terror." I can just endure the horror of Lear and Othello, but hardly that of Marlowe's Edward III. Those other inferior, though still potent Elizabethans, they likewise do not rise to these Shakesperian, Sophoclean heights of moving, yet tranquilizing tragedy—not even Webster, nor Marlowe. Whatever the great world-poet's creed, and whatever the fierce writhings of his strong nature in doubt and revolt, he had *faith in the Divine order*: the greatest Greeks had it also; and so has Hugo. But the breath of faith does not seem here to dominate his art. Yet there is necessary for high art some kind of "Katharsis," some kind of reconciliation of moral elements, or upward tendency, to give that restful sense of harmony which art demands. We cannot bear to finish upon a discord. If there be *no* "morality" indeed, the whole work is apt to seem one long series of discords, and there can only be harmony in the strange sense that between a series of discords there must of course be some kind of agreement. Here is no permanent material out of which to frame a permanently satisfying work of art. We have at best an elaborate structure with sugar, or with cards, rife with all bias toward disintegration. Lower elements are certainly needed to give variety and

movement ; but the binding, transforming power is still more needed. We cannot dispense with the loftiest, most satisfying harmony man is capable of conceiving. As religion and philosophy, practically and dogmatically, so art imaginatively, supplements the bewildering moral mysteries of life. This is not, of course, to endorse the strange opinion of some German critics, that Shakespeare had a series of copybook maxims in his head, which he wrote his plays to illustrate. Yet the more reflective, analytical, philosophical bias of our own day will necessarily influence our greatest poets, and perhaps not altogether to their advantage as artists. You may learn from the artist, albeit indirectly ; the image, the story, and the type, or teaching, grow up together as one vital unity in his soul.

“Marion Delorme,” however, seems to me among the greatest of extant dramas. Marion is a woman of light love, a celebrated courtesan. A young man of high and austere character meeting her, without knowing who she is, but taking her for a chaste maiden, indeed creating around her the ideal of young love, believes in and adores her. She is at first half amused, half astonished ; the experience is something new to her, but she conceals from him her real character ; in fact, without being aware of it, for the first time she loves. That love is her salvation ; but through what anguish and difficulty must she pass ! When a work of this order is objected to as “immoral,” the artist may well refuse to be judged by the prurient incompetence of literary prudes. The heroine is a woman originally of loose character—therefore, forsooth, the work is immoral ! Mary Magdalene, however, was also such. But Marion should not, nay, she could not repent, or it would interest us in her too much if she did. Cynics, or Pharisees may say so ; but if the grace of God, and the story of the Magdalene be not fables, we dare not say so. Let it not be averred, however, that we admire this work because it chimes in with our theology, or our deepest convictions—

there may be thousands of books which do so, without being works of art at all. Still, we prefer to see a great subject greatly treated to seeing a mean subject ever so skilfully handled. The former requires greater faculties, greater character, greater genius in the artist. Is Denner, the painter of wrinkles, though wrinkles imply no degradation, really equal to Leonardo, the painter of Christ and His apostles at the Last Supper? Art "gives form;" but whether she gives form to excrement, or gold can hardly be pronounced indifferent, especially since her materials themselves are spiritual, belonging to the artist's own nature, and that of the persons to whom his work appeals. Art "gives pleasure." But there is pleasure in brothels—and elsewhere.

The play opens with a scene in which a young gallant, Saverny, is talking lightly to Marion, and reproaching her with having a new lover. She, in fear and trembling, entreats him to go, without telling him the truth about her pure lover, Didier (an *enfant trouvé*—adopted and brought up by a good woman of the people). Saverny goes, and Didier enters; but the former is attacked in the dim lamp-lit street by murderers, and Didier hastens to the rescue. Saverny, returning to thank him, too boldly gazes at Marion. This Didier resents, and later takes the first opportunity of picking a quarrel with Saverny, who fights (nearly in the dark) without recognizing his rescuer. Now, duels have been forbidden on pain of death by Richelieu, the master of France, and of the weak King Louis XIII. Marion, by her cries, inadvertently attracts police-agents to the place, who arrest Didier, Saverny feigning death. Marion, however, contrives to deliver him from prison, and they join a band of strolling players. The transition of Marion's feelings from light to true love, traversed as they are by the dread of discovery on the part of Didier—the horror of pain, bewilderment, and fear with which she beholds the light of his pure avowals, and lofty sentiments

streaming into her impure spirit, revealing her own unworthiness of him—how she shrinks from his chaste and loyal offer of marriage—to *her*, a courtesan, who dare not tell him her name—all this is given with exquisite subtlety and truth. One day he sees a book on her table, gallant verses written to “Marion Delorme,” and he upbraids her for reading it, bursting forth into invective against the *vile woman* of whom he has heard. He supposes that she rejects him because of his mean birth and fortune, which makes him bitter. When they are with the strolling players, he bids her leave him, and not bring upon herself his miserable fate; but discovery is at hand. The development of the plot here is somewhat involved and improbable. Suffice it that both Didier, and Saverny are re-arrested by a stratagem of Laffemas, the infamous “lieutenant-criminal” of Richelieu, and that, without intending it, Saverny betrays the identity of Marion to her lover. His disappointment and rage—together with his fierce, cutting rebuffs to her affectionate attentions, so shocking to her before she knows she is discovered—are well given. But she resolves to save him again, and for this purpose makes her way into the presence of the king, Louis the Chaste, as his courtiers nickname him. He refuses to grant her request; but this leads to scenes that admirably portray the king’s pitiably weak, vacillating character, as mere puppet in the hands of the proud and cruel cardinal-minister, yet secretly chafing under his unworthy condition of tutelage. He lets the feeling escape him in private converse with the fool, D’Angely, and the Duc de Bellegarde, an old courtier. The venerable provincial baron, who comes to plead for Saverny, his nephew, and the courtier duke, are excellently drawn. The wily courtier, invited by the king (who knows how Richelieu is hated by the nobles) to give his frank opinion of the cardinal, dares not do so openly even then, well aware of the king’s unreliable character; but while Louis rails

against his minister, Bellegarde lashes him into rage by insinuating the shame of the king's position, though overtly justifying and praising the priest. With profound knowledge of human nature, the poet afterwards makes the irritated king reject the old baron's prayer for his nephew, to a great extent through anger at the baron's having brought an armed escort into the royal presence, which the baron, imprudently asserting his feudal privileges at such a moment, has proceeded to justify. The king, being governed by Richelieu, is proportionately tenacious of his rights with others—even sullenly threatening Bellegarde to repeat their private conversation to the cardinal. Later, the fool, D'Angely, partly by an amusing stratagem depending on the king's prudery, partly also by touching Louis' weakness for the chase, and averring the duel was caused by a dispute about falconry, induces him to pardon the two prisoners. The conclusion shows them in prison. Marion, on her way with the pardon, meets Laffemas, who actually holds a revocation of it in his hand, which he has wrung the moment after from the poor royal tool. Laffemas will only allow Marion to save her lover (by himself conniving at the escape) on one infamous condition. After a desperate moral struggle, she yields, for time presses. The execution is to take place at once. But Didier refuses to go with her. He upbraids her with the bitterest vehemence for deceiving him, and divines that, in order to get at him, she must have prostituted her person. Before she knows he has discovered her secret, with all a woman's affectionate wiles she entreats him to fly, reminding him of old times, and of his protestations of love to her. The loveliness of this poor creature's regenerated and self-devoting soul is given with utmost fulness and beauty. She wonders, dismayed, at his hardness; she feels that, if he will not come at once, he is lost, and she implores: "*Parle moi, voyons, parle, appelle moi Marie!*" Then he interrupts—" *Marie, ou Marion?*"—upon which she falls

horror-stricken to the ground. And yet in her despair, urging him to tread on her, confessing her sin and unworthiness, she reminds him he once asked her to be his wife. Then they hear the cannon, the death-signal! But he still loves her after all. As he is going, and taking leave of his friend, she entreats him to kiss and forgive her. At last he melts into tears, and falls into her arms. He forgives, and recognizing all the nobility of her soul, the truth of her love, he asks her to forgive *him*. There is one hope more—the *cardinal*. He is coming to see the execution. As he passes in his litter, she throws herself before it, entreating grace. But a voice comes from between the closed red curtains, "*Pas de grace!*" Senseless, she lets the crowd and the victims pass by her, and in the end stands alone, half-mad, upon the stage, pointing to the cardinal's retreating litter: "*Regardez tous! Voilà l'homme rouge qui passe!*" One feels, horrible as it is, that Didier's pure love, and this earthly hell have saved her soul. Though the plot is in parts somewhat crude and involved (for it is an early work), yet the tremendous passion, the tragic situations, the movement of the action through contrasted development of characters mutually influencing one another, all this makes a tragedy of the first order. Is the creator of Louis XIII., of the light, hare-brained, gallant French nobleman, Saverny, of the wonderful Marion, of Bellegarde the courtier, of the noble Didier—is this man merely an eccentric creator of monsters? We had one dramatist living in England, and only one, who could be compared to Hugo, and that was Richard Hengist Horne. But his plays are of course too good to be much known, or read, or acted in this country. He indeed has written some noble poetic dramas, that are both poetry and drama. We need name only "*Cosmo dei Medici*," and the "*Death of Marlowe*." And to find an English dramatist of the same order before him you must go back to Sheridan, if not to Otway; though the "*Blot on the Scutcheon*," and one or two early

pieces of Browning, may perchance make us hesitate before we speak so sweepingly.

Still Victor Hugo has written three magnificent romances, that transcend the dramas, and all the other works. All his romances indeed display the genius of the master. "L'Homme qui rit" is about the perversest and strangest, though there are passages in it of extraordinary power. But his detailed, persistent, dogmatic errors about England, and things English are what has attracted most attention here. This betrays, no doubt, an amusing weakness. And touching upon his weak points—(though we feel, in the presence of such a man, that it is somewhat irreverent to do so, and too much like one who, brought in front of Salisbury Cathedral, and remaining awhile in open-mouthed contemplation, observed at last to the enthusiastic but disappointed friend who brought him, that he thought he saw a window broken high up among the clerestories)—we may admit that often his political speeches seem to an English taste strangely high-flown and bombastic. He is not without his sins either as a French politician. I sympathize strongly with his enlightened liberalism, but not with his flattery of the national vanity, and shallow love of military "glory." He is blinded by Napoleon's genius, and condones the infinite mischief he wrought, far greater than that of his nephew, and "monkey" in the crooked paths of crime. Yet the career of the old exile of Guernsey is a grand one. Exiled to those melancholy seas of the islands for his undying hostility to the crime of December; beloved there by all the poor, especially by little children; refusing to return to his dear land with those who were amnestied in the latter time of Louis Napoleon's reign—returning only when the enemy invaded France, and Bonaparte fell; at Paris during the terrible days of the siege; in his old age—his deep, affectionate heart suffering irreparable domestic losses—consoling himself with tiny innocent grandchildren!

“L’Histoire d’un Crime,” is the story of the *Coup d’état* by one who may with pride say, *Quorum pars magna fui*. These minute details concerning one of the foulest crimes in history, disgracefully condoned in England because successful, came very opportunely when France seemed, how lately! to be on the verge of the same dark experience. The circulation of this work there has been enormous. There is a good deal about the *vexata quæstio* of passive obedience in the army, when the army is called on by Presidents in jackboots to commit treason against the State, and cut the throats of fellow-citizens. It does seem fortunate, on the whole, that the great French poet has *not* been sitting for the last seventy years like an idol with its arms folded, “holding no form of creed, but contemplating all.” What with the “Châtiments,” “Napoléon le Petit,” and this book, posterity will be able to form a good notion of M. Louis Bonaparte. However, it may modify the impression, if it pleases, after the fancy portraits drawn by Mr. Browning, and Mr. B. Jerrold. The autobiographic value of this work is at all events great. Hugo did all the most reckless and energetic personal daring could do to overthrow the military dictatorship set up by Bonaparte on the bloodstained ruins of the French Republic, and *his pen* at any rate has had no small share in actually overthrowing that dictatorship. There can be no doubt, moreover, that now and again his “so potent art” has paralyzed other Ultramontane “saviours of society,” in their impious hope of adding another to the black catalogue of crimes perpetrated in the name of the long-suffering Prince of Peace.

“L’Homme qui rit” is a monster, no doubt. So are Quasimodo in “Notre Dame,” Triboulet in “Le Roi s’amuse,” and Lucretia Borgia. But after all, Hugo is not always making characters of this kind. And when he makes them, does he make them from a pure love of the monstrous? Emphatically, no. On the contrary. He

has intense sympathy with the oppressed, rejected, and outcast of humanity. He believes there is even in them a certain Divine brotherhood with Christ. And some of our great theologians have thought the same, have seen it in the Bible, in the utterances of our Lord Himself. In Jean Valjean the convict, in Triboulet, in Lucretia Borgia, in Quasimodo, in the fallen woman, Marion, the poet shows you the Divine discipline of circumstances leading these dark, despised, damaged sinners up to higher life and light, albeit through fiery waves of terrible suffering, the discipline laying hold of one clue, one hidden thread of holier natural feeling, and by this drawing them out of the darkness of their spiritual catacomb. Then Hugo, great dramatic interpreter of human nature, as in duty bound, if only for the sake of contrast, and the play of moral forces, paints all; but he puts all in its own place; he does not insist on the evil from dislike of, or personal incapacity for believing, discerning, and sympathizing with the good: he puts it beneath, in its own place, not above; nor represents it as if it stood alone. Evil, surely, is too prominent in the marvellous realism of Balzac ("sacraments of adultery and divorce," Carlyle says), as in the neo-paganism of other inferior, though clever modern writers. But Hugo has painted Josiane in "L'Homme qui rit," and a portrait of richest colour it is.

Still our poet is doubtless an idealist. I do not, in fact, just now remember more than three great portrayers of humanity who are not—to wit, Fielding, Balzac, and Thackeray; for writers like Smollett cannot be ranked among the highest. Hugo represents men as they usually are; but sometimes also men as they might be. Indeed, of Fielding, Balzac, and Thackeray, that they are realists in art, is only true in a limited sense. For no true artist reproduces individuals. But it will be asked, Does he not create them? Yes, certainly; and the only question therefore is, Whether his individuals are more or less like the

ordinary people one meets about? Is an artist bound to confine himself to these? or may he not rather create individuals of a rarer, more ideal type, persons who might be, who may have been, who will be? so carrying us away from the vulgar levels of every-day existence, interesting our imaginations in remote mysterious regions, bearing us toward grander, stranger, or higher possibilities, by means of these very creations, one day to become realities? May not these be the more "real" after all?

"Forms more real than living man,
Nurslings of immortality?"

What we have a right to demand is that art-creations shall be *self-consistent*, living with their own proper, native harmony of life. Then these are indeed shadows of the types, according to which men and the worlds are ever created by the Divine Artist. The Hamlet of Shakespeare's spirit is himself a living spirit, whether in Shakespeare, or in those who make friends with the offspring of Shakespeare. It is remarked, indeed, how often an artist differs from his own ideals. Fundamentally, perhaps, he differs not, but for the nonce and superficially he does differ. Perugino paints saintly pictures, and is apparently not a saintly person. Are not, then, other spirits uttering themselves through his spirit? He is inspired; even as Balaam, who came to curse, was constrained to bless. For the rest, what we insist on as *especially "real,"* is, in fact, contingent phenomenon of sense, is least real of all. Such grand creations as *Œdipus*, *Agamemnon*, *Achilles*, *Clytemnestra*, *Hamlet*, *Lady Macbeth*, *Othello*, *Jean Valjean*, *Gilliat*, *Consuelo*, *Faust*, stand towering above mortals, like colossal images on cloud cast by veritable forms of gods standing high upon the temple-wall of their own eternal habitation. As for those characters that *first* strike us as types, rather than as individuals, they are impersonations of particular qualities, and only a genius like Molière's can make them

tolerable. The abstracting intellect is too much at work here.

Some say, however, that Valjean is not *self-consistent*; the illiterate, rude convict could never become the Madeleine of later times. Yet those who know something of the history of "conversions" will never admit this. There was a desperately bad character, coarse, violent, brutal, apparently lost to all good feeling, in the Home of Mrs. Vickers at Brighton—Miss Ellice Hopkins has written about her—no love, no preaching seemed to affect her. But she is now the most trusted and most trustworthy of the matrons there. *Tant pis pour les faits*, a theorist or a cynic may say. We say, *Tant pis pour les théories!* The very point, moreover, of Valjean's history is that he was *made* bad by the radically unjust, indiscriminating punishment of society. He stole a bit of bread in a mad moment of poignant anxiety, not for himself, but for those dear to him, who were reduced to the last extremity through no fault of his. Fate pressed this outcast hard from the beginning; he was one of the "Misérables;" then, sorely tempted, rightly, or wrongly, he stole. His punishment was to be confined and herded with the worst of criminals. The sense of doom, of injustice, rankled in him; associated with the worst and most desperate of his fellow-men, he became bad. Released at length from prison, he was the sullen foe of well-to-do, comfortable society. A good old bishop houses him, and, though he knows his story, treats him with the utmost confidence, as if his character were undamaged, leaving silver candlesticks within his reach, and placing him in a guest-chamber near his own. He is astonished; but in the middle of the night he is tempted to make off with the candlesticks: and one of the most powerful scenes of the book is where he passes with them through the bishop's room, and sees the moonlight resting on the placid face of his kind and saintly host, whom, had he wakened, Valjean might have murdered.

He is arrested and brought back (not by the bishop's order), and, to screen him, the bishop says that he has *given* him the candlesticks. (Here, no doubt, the writers of virtuous English novels may raise a point of casuistry.) He dismisses Valjean with the solemn words, "Jean Valjean, mon frère, vous n'appartenez plus au mal, mais au bien. C'est votre âme que je vous achete ; je la retire au pensées noires, et à l'esprit de perdition, et je la donne à Dieu !" But after this he met a little Savoyard, as he was tramping along, who dropped a piece of money in the gathering twilight. Valjean instinctively, and savagely put his foot on it, refusing to give it up, though the boy scolded and cried. So the child went off sobbing. Yet this brutality was the beast's expiring effort in Valjean, and the tears of the boy, together with the Christ-like conduct of the bishop toward him, did their holy work. So years after we meet him as M. Madeleine, the self-educated, upright, benevolent mayor of a country town, beloved and trusted by all. He has dropped the old name with the old nature. There is no verisimilitude in this, we have been told. In whose eyes, we reply ? Not, we believe, in the eyes of those unblinded by theory, who know most of the history and profound secrets of human nature. Is he represented, however, as perfect, as having no stain, as free from all necessity to struggle with sin ? Not at all. The very contrary. One of the most powerful passages in all literature is the chapter called "Une tempête sous un crâne"—wherein, another man having been arrested as Valjean for the robbery of the Savoyard, Madeleine debates all one night whether he shall give himself up or not, so relinquishing the excellent and needful work he is doing as mayor, leaving, moreover, the poor lost woman, Fantine, who is expecting him to bring her child, Cosette, to her on her death-bed, and whom he has already influenced for good. But he must go the very next morning to Arras, if he decides to surrender himself, where the man's trial will

be taking place: he might even now be too late. But shall he, must he go back to the horrible convict life, losing the respect and love of men, now so dear to him in his new existence?

He decides to go. The accidents of his journey, the delays, his entry into the judgment hall of Arras, where he can only make his way through the crowd by sending a message to the judge that the (well-known) Mayor Madeleine requests he may have a seat on the bench; his hesitation when alone in the corridors leading thither as to whether he shall push the old door or not; his emergence into the dirty, crowded hall, badly lighted by guttering candles; his bewildered observation of the scene; the judge's bow to him; his own voice startling even himself, as he announces himself to the incredulous court for the true Jean Valjean; Javert's—the police-officer's—recognition of him—all is told with a marvellous imaginative realism of detail, that lays hold upon the soul and never lets it go. This Javert, a very incarnation of the French detective police, is a portrait painted with such solidity and perfection that one seems to have known him in the flesh, as one does the original of a portrait by Titian. He is at once type and individual, as Othello is. He is the implacable foe of Valjean throughout—embodiment of formal law blindly carrying out the (roughly moral and necessary) edict of human society upon a branded criminal, who is indeed criminal no longer—right from its own limited point of view, yet wrong and blundering in this instance—as in many—fulfilling, however, in the end, grand purposes of God by inflicting life-suffering on this upward-tending human spirit. The figure of poor Fantine, too, another victim of society and hard circumstances, is quite imperishable. She dies, singing that song of yearning for her child, whom in this world, alas! she is not to see. Still more exquisite and imperishable, if possible, is Cosette, the young girl whose life and fate are bound up so inextricably with those of Valjean. The

latter, again a convict, his chains having been struck off, saves a drowning man in the harbour of Toulon, by an extraordinary exertion of strength, courage, and agility ; but he himself never reappears to the authorities, and is supposed to be drowned. He has really dived, and swum a long way under cover of darkness ; and we meet him far off, seeking for the child Cosette, whom Fantine had entreated him to seek out at the Thenardiers', where she had placed the girl. They are publicans, and there the poor child has been sadly ill-treated. The Thenardiers seem to start out of the book as repulsive, mean, veritably living persons. They are both bad, man and wife, but how well-contrasted in their diverse, mutually reacting villainy ! Not a trace of exaggeration or caricature is there, though Hugo is by some supposed always to exaggerate. The effect is produced by depicting subtle *nuances* of word, gesture, and action—not by the author's reflective analysis, as in George Eliot, or by that reflective analysis often inappropriately put into the character's own mouth, as in Mr. Browning. Hugo's is certainly the more dramatic method, though he can analyze when he pleases with all the psychological subtlety of either author. The misery of the poor, neglected, overworked child, and all her ways in that family, are described with unrivalled force and pathos—as she sits in the chimney corner of the *cabaret*, with nervous, lifelong fear expressed in every lineament and gesture, ragged, ugly, pale, thin. Thenardier is a small man, popularly supposed to be ruled by his big, loud-spoken wife ; but the contrary is true. The woman has one good point—she is fond of her own little girls. But she “has not time” to teach Cosette to pray, or to take her to church. One evening these little girls are playing with the cat, and every one's attention being diverted, Cosette ventures to drop the leaden sword she habitually nurses for a doll, and furtively takes up the real one, belonging to the other children. It is twilight, and she is in the shadow,

sitting on the floor ; but the firelight happening to fall upon a rosy leg of the wax doll, the children, looking round at the moment, see what she has dared to do. They make an exclamation ; and then the woman calls to her in a voice of thunder, threatening to beat her. Jean Valjean (in his soiled, tattered clothes) is sitting there, and he, who has come in with the child and asked for lodgings, thereupon walks out, returning soon with a wonderful doll, which Cosette had been admiring open-mouthed in a shop window when Mother Thenardier sent her that very evening to the spring in the wood for water with a bucket. There Valjean first met her. The shop-window lighted up had seemed Paradise to the poor neglected child, with that large, lovely lady doll in the midst ; and now, to the indignant astonishment of all, Valjean presents Cosette with this very doll ! The child's despair at having to leave the town alone in the chill evening, and enter the wood, is terribly felt and rendered. When she enters the dark forest, she fancies ghosts pursuing her, and at last, with beating heart, she sits down exhausted at the spring. "À côté d'elle l'eau agitée faisait des cercles, qui ressemblaient des serpents de feu bleu. Au dessus de sa tête le ciel était couvert de vastes nuages noirs, qui étaient comme des pans de fumée. Le tragique masque de l'ombre semblait se pencher vaguement sur cet enfant. Jupiter se couchait dans les profondeurs. L'enfant regardait d'un œil égaré cette grosse étoile qu'elle ne connaissait pas, et qui lui faisait peur. La planète en ce moment était pres de l'horizon, et traversait une épaisse couche de brume, qui lui donnait une rougeur horrible. La brume lugubrement empourprée élargissait l'astre." Then he describes the fearful branches of the trees, and the dismal sounds of the chilly wind in them—proceeding with his own extraordinary power to enlarge on the strange weird living horrors of the twilight forest. Every touch tells, though the mind is almost oppressed with the multiplicity of detail. But he, and Charles Dickens have a

similar faculty of feeling and expressing the dim, veiled, spiritual life in Nature, which we can only discern through a glass darkly, but which is there, and has so deep a spiritual influence upon men. (Elsewhere, though not here, Hugo injures his impressiveness by overloading his canvas, and unduly multiplying epithets; by a want of self-restraint; by the volubility, and sometimes alloyed appropriateness of his adjectives or similes; by an almost artificial, strained grotesqueness, and passion for lurid effects.) "Cette pénétration des ténèbres est inexprimablement sinistre dans un enfant. Les forêts sont des apocalypses; et le battement d'aile d'une petite âme fait un bruit d'agonie sous leur voûte monstrueuse." At last she takes courage to fill the bucket, and goes, counting "one, two, three," to dissipate her horror, with the heavy iron bucket freezing her hands, spilling its water on them, and her poor naked legs. "C'était un enfant de huit ans; il n'y avait que Dieu en ce moment qui voyait cette chose triste. Et sans doute la mère hélas! Car il est des choses qui font ouvrir les yeux aux mortes dans leur tombeau. Elle soufflait avec une sorte de râlement douloureux; des sanglots lui serraient la gorge." And she reflected the Thenardiers would beat her when she got back! She often stops to rest. The misery is almost too terrible here. "Cependant le pauvre petit être désespéré ne put s'empêcher de s'écrier: O mon Dieu! mon Dieu! En ce moment elle sentit tout à coup que le seau ne pesait plus rien!" Valjean had come behind, and was carrying the bucket for her!

Valjean again takes another name, and lives retired in Paris with Cosette. But he is tracked by his old enemy, Javert, and the story of his escape with Cosette up a water-pipe, with Cosette on his back, by help of a rope, into the garden of a convent, is one of the *sensational* parts of the book, reminding one of Dumas the Elder, or Eugène Sue, and equally good as their admirable writing about such things. There is a dash of the boy, of the gamin, about this great

poet, and he is not above a spice of adventure, excitement, and romance. Let the reverend seniors shake their heads at him then! For his part the present writer likes it. Of this sort, too, is Valjean's extraordinary exit from the convent garden in a coffin, by the help of an old sexton, who only knew him as Madeleine, in order that he may re-enter it to put Cosette to school there. Another similar episode is his bearing the senseless young Marius on his back through the sewers of Paris, after he (Marius) has been shot on the barricades of 1832. Extremely fascinating is his account of this convent and its inmates. Here, as elsewhere, he shows a perfect dramatic ability to understand and sympathize with characters or modes of thought diametrically opposed to his own, and to do them justice. There is, moreover, one of the curious episodical dissertations here with which the book abounds, and which no doubt interferes with its technical perfection as a work of art, by breaking up the unity of its impression; but these could just be bodily removed elsewhere, as wantonly stuck on, though admirable enough in themselves, and then there would stand forth one of the masterpieces of human genius in all its own sublimely massive integrity. He has in this part a chapter on prayer, which is refutation sufficient of bigots or ignoramuses who have charged him, forsooth! with "atheism." He contends, on the contrary, for a personal God, and for the necessity of prayer to Him. Nothing can be further from the blind and bigoted sciolism that hurls itself foaming against, or makes mouths of a monkey at, or dismisses with a gesture of conceited contempt, the profoundest and most universal religious convictions of mankind. His poetic humanity is too broad and deep for that. But then he has the first requisite of the poet—though one scarcely necessary to the versifier, or the critic—namely, manhood. Before being poet, one must be man. "Il y a une philosophie qui nie l'infini. Il y a aussi une classée pathologiquement qui nie le soleil; cette philosophie

s'appelle *cécité*. Ériger un sens qui nous manque en source de vérité, c'est un bel aplomb d'aveugle." Speaking of the self-satisfied airs of atheists, he says: "On croit entendre une taupe s'écrier: ils me font pitié avec leur soleil!"

We have also a most brilliant account of Waterloo, and Napoleon—apropos of Marius and Thenardier—and a detailed dissertation about the Paris sewers! In that part there is, indeed, an almost morbid propensity to enlarge unduly on the horrible. But though the political history of events preceding 1832 is too long, the story of the barricades and their defenders, Enjolras, Gavroche, etc., is admirable, and a quite legitimate episode from the point of view of perfect art. The characters here are lightly sketched, are connected with the main personages, and by their side-eddies give relief to the intense strain of the grand current. The sketch of the little Paris gamin, Gavroche, is a master-sketch for all time. Behold him finding the poor little lost children in the Luxembourg gardens, talking to them patronizingly, and taking them home with him to sleep in his hole under an old broken statue of an elephant; making them comfortable; a mite full of impudence, and resource, and premature knowledge; pure and kindly, in spite of his bad human surroundings! See the awe of the small, gentle, carefully protected children in his presence! The humour of the talk between these three is equal to any humour whatsoever. And here we stop to note what absurd general statements are made upon insufficient data: *e.g.* that the French have no humour, only wit. This, and much else in Hugo, shows most genuine humour, and fills us with astonishment at the immense range of his gifts. And those two lost boys in the Luxembourg Gardens, before they met their powerful protector, Master Gavroche! There was a bourgeois with his little boy feeding swans in the pond. When they left, the other lost boys approached, and the elder reached a bit of bread,

which the ripple of water (made by the swans swimming to it) had pushed within reach; this he gave to his hungry brother of five years old. Meanwhile, the noise of distant fighting at the barricades is borne towards them. As for Gavroche, he dies on the barricades, receiving first one bullet, then another; gaily singing light songs between each wound, and making "vulgar signs," as Thackeray calls them, after his kind, at the soldiers.

When Cosette leaves the convent, she lives quietly with Valjean, and grows up into a woman. All this part is literature of the very highest quality—the girl's opening nature is subtly and delicately unfolded—nothing here is heavy, or laboured, or difficult, but the tender touches are worthy of so tender and sweet a rose. Except Juliet, in Shakespeare, and Marguerite, in Goethe, we know of no similar portrait to equal this. The love of Cosette for the old man, and his infinitely greater love for her, who is the only human object he has to love; the ennobling, strengthening effect of this love upon him when his old nature threatens to rule him again, feeling as he does the chaos, the injustice, and blindness of society, the miserable spectacle of human mistakes, and sins, and disappointments: all this is unique, and intensely original, the climax being when another love comes in between him and this child as she grows up, her love for a young man, Marius Pontmercy, and his love for her. Then begins in earnest again the struggle of good and evil in this great chastised nature. How can he yield her to another, who is the very channel of God's grace to him, as well as his only little flower, bringing sweetness and colour into his life? See then, reader, that Valjean is no monster of perfection! They were living in an old retired house together; and here, by the side of his misery, obscurity, hateful memory of the past, and dread lest she should know it, feeling himself ever liable to be tracked and recaptured, Cosette grew from a plain child into a pretty girl. She only began to be

aware of her beauty when she heard some passer say, "*Folie, mais mal mise.*" Though she could not fancy he meant her, she began to look in the glass, and attend to her dress after that. Valjean was sorry when she became pretty; "a mother would have been glad." Before, she had been content with their retired life together; now she began to want to go out in the streets, and to need some amusements. A slight sense of separation grows up insensibly between them. Then Marius appears on the scene—a good-looking, but untidy and studious youth, reading on a bench in the Luxembourg Gardens, as Cosette and the old man pass of a morning. Marius and she only gradually begin to take notice of one another. When Cosette began to care about him, it was only as a kind of charming distant vision; and the girl really thought she was expressing all she felt in saying to Valjean, "*Quel délicieux jardin que le Luxembourg!*" There is also much humour in the account of Marius's budding love—his putting on a new coat and gloves, but always pretending to read as the couple passed. Jean Valjean cordially detests him, as a possible lover, and says to Cosette one day, "*Que ce jeune homme à l'air pédant!*" to which she replies with supreme calm, "*Ce jeune homme là?*" as if she had noticed him for the first time in her life. Then, "How stupid I am!" thought Valjean: "she had not remarked him. *C'est moi qui le lui montre! O! simplicité des vieux! profondeur des enfants!*" At length he determines to remove; and she, albeit very tender to him whom she regards as her father, seems silent and sorrowful, though (educated in a convent) she scarce knows yet that she indeed loves Marius. One morning the girl and Valjean go out to see the sun rise. "*Elle regardait les papillons sur les fleurs, mais ne les prenait pas; les mansuétudes, et les attendrissements naissent avec l'amour, et la jeune fille qui à en elle un idéal tremblante et fragile à pitié de l'aile d'un papillon.*" At last she meets Marius, and he avows his love. Then follows

an exquisite idyl, and here with equal perfection are described the young loves of their fresh souls, and the spring-tide of the beautiful garden, so harmonious with them, where they used to steal their brief meetings. "Foliis ac Frondibus" is unsurpassed for tenderness of natural description: every feature and tint and tone in the spiritual and the natural are here soft echoes of one another. But Marius, one of the republicans, has to go to the barricades, and Valjean goes also, though only to attend to the wounded. As related, he saves Marius's life, and moreover Javert's, who becomes his prisoner. But Marius was all the time insensible, and does not know who his deliverer is. Valjean consents to the marriage of the lovers, but his heart is broken, for he feels he ought to reveal his true history and position to them, separating himself from them for ever. Yet this resolution causes him a fearful struggle. This combat of the flesh and spirit could not be more religiously described. "Combien de fois, terrassée par la lumière, lui avait il crié grace! Cette lumière implacable, allumée en lui et sur lui par l'évêque, l'avait il ébloui de force, lorsqu'il souhaitait être aveugle! Combien de fois s'était il relevé sanglant, meurtri, brisé, éclairé, le désespoir au cœur, la sérénité dans l'âme! Et vaincu il se sentait vainqueur! et sa conscience lui disait: maintenant va en paix!"

The prose epithalamium on the first bridal night of Marius and Cosette is a piece of chaste and lovely poetry. But the climax of all modern poetry, as it seems to the present writer, is in the chapter where Valjean leaves the happy wedding supper, and goes alone to the old house where the girl and he had lived so long. There he locks himself into Cosette's empty room, and by candlelight unfastens an old box that he had always preserved, containing the childish frocks and stockings and trinkets that he had given her when he took her away from the Thenardiens at Montfermeil. These he arranges on her bed, one by

one, calling to mind the far-away night when he found her first; and then their walk together through the wood on leaving Montfermeil. The trees were without leaves, the sky without sun or birds, but ah! "Elle n'était pas plus haute que cela, elle avait sa grande poupée dans ses bras, elle avait mis son louis d'or dans la poche de ce tablier: elle riait; ils marchaient tous les deux se tenant la main, elle n'avait que lui au monde! Alors sa vénérable tête blanche tomba sur le lit, ce vieux cœur stoïque se brisa, sa face s'abîma dans les vêtements de Cosette, et si quelqu'un eut passé dans l'escalier, on eut entendu d'effrayants sanglots." And here all night in the cold, with his head on the bed, kissing the little child's things, he debates with himself whether he dare do as the young husband and wife have both entreated, go and live with them, and so run the risk of inflicting his infamy upon them, should he be discovered. This agony the poet calls, "Le septième cercle, et le huitième ciel." Finally he denounces himself to Marius. "Vous demandez pourquoi je parle! je ne suis ni dénoncé, ni poursuivi, ni traqué. Si! par qui? par moi! Il faut si on veut être heureux, monsieur, ne jamais comprendre le devoir; car dès qu'on l'a compris, il est implacable; on dirait qu'il vous punit de le comprendre; mais non; il vous récompense, car il vous met dans un enfer, ou l'on sent à côté de soi Dieu." But Marius, though he shrinks from him at first, feels his grandeur, and Thenardier, while trying to injure him in the eyes of Marius, unintentionally reveals Valjean as the heroic deliverer he has longed to discover. All the heroism of his life and character becomes little by little as clear to the husband as it is to Cosette; but the end is near. Now that his angel child is taken from him, he sinks in his lonely dwelling, so full of memories of her. There is nothing in Shakespeare, or Sophocles, more intensely pathetic than his death, with Marius and Cosette, whom he has sent for, kneeling by the bedside. This may stand as a companion

picture to the death of Lear, or that of Œdipus. As Madeleine, the mayor, he saved a little money, made by discovery of a process of manufacture, which he, in broken phrases, explains to the lovers: this money will be theirs. He has placed a crucifix near him. To that he points. "Behold," he says, "the Great Martyr!" Other tender, loving, and beautiful things he speaks brokenly to his children. "Cosette et Marius tomberent à genoux, éperdus, étouffés de larmes, chacun sur une des mains de Jean Valjean. Ces mains augustes ne remuaient plus. La nuit était sans étoiles, et profondément obscure. Sans doute dans l'ombre quelque ange immense était debout, les ailes déployées, attendant l'âme." That angel, the poet suggests, may have been the bishop. "La mort, c'est l'entrée dans la grande lueur." Truly God hath chosen the weak, and foolish, and despised things of this world to confound the wise and powerful; and things that are not, to bring to nought those that are, that no flesh should glory in His presence. Here is no less than the story of the human soul, travelling from darkness and through darkness up to light eternal, "kept by the power of God unto salvation." And *though* it has the misfortune to be elevating and ennobling, we believe that it may almost be described as (*pace* a recent school of critics) "a work of art."

We must not be tempted to linger over that other great romance, the "Travailleurs de la Mer." Here is man in presence of Nature, wrestling with her, as Jacob wrestled with the angel, and overcoming. The colossal will and energy of Gilliatt, the hero, are striving against the tremendous and overwhelming infinitude of Nature's indignant and infuriated legions. Baffled, thrown back, working on to achieve the impossible, he at last achieves it. May not this poem be described as the distinctively modern epic desiderated by Carlyle? It celebrates "*tools* and *the man*," the dignity of labour. Yet one reward, beyond the reward of great work achieved, he sought; that had been his

original motive-force—love—the love of a simple girl. When he returns, his work achieved, he finds the girl loves another, though to him she had been promised by her father, in case he should do what seemed beyond human power to do. The other is good and beautiful—lovable by a girl. Gilliatt is only heroic. He might marry her; the other has her love; so he yields them to one another. The ship that bears them away on a calm sea passes in the evening close to the rock where he is sitting; and, himself unseen, he sees the lovers toying together in their young joy. He does not move. The tide rises; still he does not move. The sea, that he has conquered, works her will on him now unresistingly. This magnificent work has with truth been compared to the “Prometheus” of Æschylus. To that it bears much analogy. A ship has been wedged high up between two rocks, partly by human treachery, partly by the tempest. Gilliatt undertakes to float her, unaided, and for this purpose he must live alone on these barren rocks (the Douvres), in the midst of the raging and melancholy northern seas. The poet’s long exile in Guernsey stood him in good stead here. The rocky Channel islets, with their marvellous submarine habitations and inhabitants, are most vividly described; but the book is in one aspect a long poem of the sea. The sea is represented in all her moods; grave, sombre, terrific, in tempestuous frenzy, gay, smiling, serene. The very salt breath of turbulent storm blows and raves through these wonderful pages, and the poet shows himself no less a master in dealing with grand and awful, or tender and subtle forces of external Nature, than with grand and awful, or tender and subtle powers and emotions of man. Here he is modern. The conscious and definite influence of external Nature upon man, as also the increase of his power over her, his study of her laws for his own purposes, this is peculiarly modern. And this element accordingly is very pronounced in the great modern romantic poet. But this

element does not in him overpower the human. Nature, in fact, here almost occupies the very place of the gods in the older mythologies, which indeed is her right place. The gods are Nature ; Nature is the gods. She is in some sense stronger than man ; yet he is in some sense stronger than she. He is greater than what seems to him material nature, in so far as she is or seems material, though in this character she lays the yoke of her Ananke upon him, which now he overcomes, and which now overcomes him. But as obeying the Divine law of her inmost being she is greater than man ; he must bow to the Divine necessity of her Order. Then there is that awful irony of Fate or circumstance, which is so pronounced in the work of Sophocles and Shakespeare, as it is likewise in that of Victor Hugo. Man is crossed and thwarted, after all his plans and preparations, life-long exertions and fondest hopes ; something altogether different being determined as final outcome and result. Gilliatt on the rock drowning, and his love gliding to happiness with another. This is the end of the life-toil ; yet he cannot have laboured or loved in vain.—“ Behind the veil ! Behind the veil ! ”

Hugo's intense realistic imagination of the terrible is of course peculiarly manifest in Gilliatt's encounter with the Pieuvre, or immense devil-fish, in the lovely sea-cavern, so charmingly described. That this is exaggerated is not true, for enormous creatures of the kind exist, at all events, in tropical seas.* This is St. George and the Dragon over again ; and you might as well blame Ariosto, or Dante, or great mediæval painters and sculptors, for their innumerable elaborate creations of such monstrous objects, as blame the modern, who has, by his study of modern science, seen

* Hugo told me, when I had the honour of being presented to him in Paris, and described my swims in and about the Gouliot caves in Sark, and conversations with the boatmen there concerning the octopus, that he had himself seen either in those caves, or in the Boutiques, an immense octopus pursuing a bather.

and restored much that our ancestors conceived. The Pieuvre, moreover, is an ugly symbol of the evil spiritual powers, with which man contends. For the rest, Hugo may revel in his strength of creation in this region, as Ariosto and Dante revelled before him; as the builders too of our great Gothic cathedrals revelled in their gargoyles and hobgoblins. But before we quit this romance, observe the perfect unity of it as a work of art. The same is true of "Notre Dame de Paris." In that I can only draw attention to the splendid portrait of the supple, brilliant gipsy girl, Esmeralda, and her goat, which I think must have suggested Fedalma to George Eliot, as the wonderful Anzoletto of George Sand must have suggested Tito.

In conclusion, we come to the recently-published romance of the Revolution—"Quatre-vingt-treize." Nothing, I have said already, can have more perfect artistic unity than this. And remember that it may not be so easy to rein in Pegasus as to drive a hackney-coach-horse with perfect propriety along a well-worn high road, which hackney-coachmen of the gentle, and ungentle crafts should remember. Respectable people, nay, and "poetical," sentimental, superfine, academical people, with pouncet boxes, and faultless "taste," who have successfully embanked the tame waters of their canal, seem to claim the right, therefore, of abusing Enceladus for not keeping his Etna-fires in like prim order. A suburban villa garden making mouths at a forest! Is that very edifying? Now here there is near the commencement a powerful, though doubtless somewhat grotesque description of a carronade that got loose on a ship, and behaved like a living demon, in the end causing the destruction of the ship and her crew. This has at once been pounced upon by the funny tribe of criticasters, poetlings, parodists, and punsters, whom the public pays to tickle, or sadden it with strange antics. And the English people are too often only in a position to judge the great Frenchman from such silly reproductions

of, or strictures upon, his occasional tricks of manner—say the casual warts upon one of his fingers. That there is anything very absurd in this description of the carronade's behaviour, we for our part are not ready to admit. He endows it with a terrible grotesque weird life of its own indeed. But are the poetlings and criticasters prepared to swear that these things are really dead? that he who should deem otherwise must necessarily be a fool? Do they know so much about it as all that? Possibly Hugo may know as much as they do. We do not attach great importance to the mouths made by people to whom a primrose is "a yellow primrose and nothing more" at those to whom it is a deal more. And, after all, are these people sure that, even from the most mechanical, prosaic view of the matter, if a heavy iron carronade gets loose upon a ship in a storm, it will *not* play the very deuce, as this one did? But here you have dapper pigmies standing by a colossus, and spitting at him, because they can see nothing more of him than a few casual stains and irregularities, that are level with their own noses. Or rather, they have a dim, uneasy sense of something towering, and soaring away from them; so the painful feeling of their own dwarfed impotence makes them prefer to fix their attention, and direct that of the passers, to these palpable roughnesses on the base of the mighty Memnon, whose solemn sounds are ringing in the pure dawn above.

What shall be said of the opening chapter, where the republican sergeant, Radoub, and his soldiers, marching through a wood, find a poor ragged woman with two children in a thicket, where she has taken refuge from the civil war that has desolated her home? The conversation between this poor peasant, the *vivandière* of the regiment, and the rough, rollicking, but generous-hearted and gallant sergeant, reads just like life—as if it were a transcript. The keen political partizanship of these hot Parisian warriors is contrasted with the vacant and ignorant replies

of the poor Breton mother, who takes no side, and does not understand either side, but just naïvely and inevitably lets out her superstitious, unquestioning reverence for things established, in her replies, in spite of all she has suffered from the feudal lord and from the priest. This at first enrages her rough querists; but the common humanity of the parties asserts itself at last, and the regiment ends by adopting the poor children, and taking the mother with them. The rapid, broad mastery of the strokes bringing out the figures of these poor illiterate people, is in the manner of Scott, or Shakespeare, rather than in the elaborate, analytic manner of Browning, or George Eliot. The perfect fairness and truth, moreover, with which both parties to this great and terrible modern controversy are given, notwithstanding the poet's own strong bias toward Liberalism, is most remarkable, and evidence enough, surely, of his first-rate dramatic capability.

Here you have the epic of the Revolution; and you see that one need not be cold and impassive, without personal convictions, or passionate humanity, in order to be a great artist. One need not take a merely artistic, æsthetic interest in the world and its doings—"sitting as God, holding no form of creed, but contemplating all." Indeed, this is to be a Brummagem god merely; a stock, or a stone: he is most like God, who is most human. Goethe was, in fact, an exception, instead of being the rule, as minor æsthetic persons appear to suppose. And, save in "Faust," which, as he said himself, "is incommensurable," and assuredly one of the world's masterpieces, I cannot think that Goethe, any more than Schiller—though he too was a great dramatist—attained the same degree of human truth, intensity, and grandeur, as Victor Hugo. Schiller, however, died young. Compare, for instance, Goethe's peasants and illiterate people with Hugo's. The latter talk *argot*; but it is not the *argot* merely that makes Gavroche so living. This is no exceedingly clever study by a catholic-minded *littérateur*.

The man Hugo lives in Gavroche, Thenardier, Michelle Flechard, or Radoub, as that other man, Shakespeare, lived in Falstaff, Iago, Malvolio, or the grave-digger—lives more even, we fancy, in his children, than that other lived in Arthur, or Macduff's little son. (If Shakespeare practised all the trades he shows a knowledge of, as the critics seem to think he did, we wonder, by the way, how many trades Hugo has practised. He certainly has rather the weakness of seeming omniscient; and his technical terms, together with his *argot*, make him very hard reading for a foreigner.) Mephistopheles and Faust are indeed great representative figures; but as for Werther, the Saint Preux of Rousseau anticipates him. Do you not see Goethe's temperament in the comparative pallor of his pictures? Shakespeare's in the depth and richness of his?

The old Breton marquis, Lantenac, represents the royalist and conservative party. He is appointed commander-in-chief of the royalist armies in La Vendée—a stern, indeed cruel old man, imbued with all ancient prejudices, and all the unbending haughtiness of his illustrious race, reserved, cold and sarcastic, brave, energetic, a grand seigneur of the old school, a born soldier, full of resource and capability. This is a magnificent full-length picture, without a tinge of caricature, felt and represented with utter fidelity. To him are opposed Gauvain, his grand-nephew, and Cimourdain, an ex-priest, tutor of Gauvain. Both these again are splendidly portrayed. The corvette in which Lantenac has embarked for Brittany, through fault of the man whose business it had been to secure the carronades, becomes (as already mentioned) unmanageable. This gives the republican fleet opportunity to close in upon the corvette, she having the *Minquiers* rocks, and the choice of wreck on them, behind her. The same man, by a daring act, manages to secure the carronade in its place again, but the mischief is done. Lantenac therefore decorates him for his bravery, and has him shot for his carelessness. There is only one

chance of Lantenac's escaping—if somebody who knows the coast will row him away from the doomed vessel in a boat, and land him alone. One volunteers to do this. In the open sea this man, however, informs Lantenac that he is brother to that other person who has just been shot by the marquis's order ; so he bids the marquis prepare to die. Then follows a very powerful scene, wherein Lantenac dominates the boatman, whose hand is on the trigger of his pistol, by sheer force of character, by skilful appeal also to their common beliefs and aspirations, political as well as religious. This man (Halmalo) becomes his most devoted adherent, to whom he gives commissions of the utmost importance. Landed, he pursues his way alone, but finds that his descent has been anticipated, and a price put upon his head. An old beggar, named Telmarch, one of the people of his own estate, conceals Lantenac in his strange wild den under the roots of a tree, till all immediate danger is past. Ultimately, Lantenac puts himself at the head of the peasants. All these his adventures, and the crises of his fate, are told with the utmost graphic power of keeping our interest alive ; complicating and involving, then unravelling the web of circumstances, so carrying the reader on through the story, a faculty essential to the novelist's art, but which those skilful in character-drawing do not always possess. As general, Lantenac, to attain his political ends, shrinks from no severity. Victorious, he has prisoners and women shot. Among others, the mother of the children adopted by the republican battalion is shot, while the children are carried away as hostages. Telmarch, creeping out of his den, finds the neighbouring village on fire, and corpses of massacred persons in the street. Then he regrets having saved Lantenac. But the mother is not quite dead. He takes and cures her of her wounds. Yet she only revives to find her children gone. Her scant-worded, brooding despair, as she slowly recovers, is terribly given. At last she sets off to seek the children. A passer informs her that

they have probably been taken to La Tourgue. Gauvain, in fact, defeats Lantenac in several battles (one of these in the town of Dol is described with extraordinary power), and forces him to find refuge at length with only a few faithful followers in the old feudal tower or castle, La Tourgue, which is the hereditary seat of their family. This Gauvain and Cimourdain besiege. The illiterate peasant mother of these children is a most admirable figure throughout. There is no single trait or word inconsistent with her simple, rude, almost savage concentration of yearning, devoted, suffering, all-braving maternity. How grotesque would she have seemed, rendered in the microscopic-psychology fashion of Mr. Browning, analyzing her own self in Mr. Browning's own peculiar, uncouth, involved, and learned diction! But how remote from the poet's own immediate personality is such a figure, and what great dramatic genius is implied by the transference of many such to his canvas!

Through the character of Cimourdain there is the best truthful and sympathetic explanation extant of the terrible violence of revolutionary idealists like Robespierre; while there is interpretation even of wretches like Marat as instruments of providential purpose, as reaction too from the long grinding tyranny of centuries; such tyranny being incidentally indicated, partly by a minute description of the feudal fortress, La Tourgue, with its horrors of dungeon and torture (a description likewise necessary to a due comprehension of the siege, which involves the catastrophe of the whole piece, and occupies all the third volume), partly also by what the mother, Flechard, relates to the Parisian soldiers in that opening scene of all. In this arrangement the reader will note there is consummate art. Cimourdain is possessed with an idea—the republican. He is possessed with poignant, indignant pity for the sufferings of the people. All the old Bastilles, all institutions founded upon prejudice and selfish privilege of caste, which keep the people in slavery, all these must fall; and with them the

castes themselves, the persons who are their inveterate, implacable supporters. Blood must be let in torrents at such a crisis. The king, priests, and nobles must be slain; nay, even the women and children of these castes may not be spared. All royal and aristocratic Europe must be "terrified." No quarter shall be given. Even the imbruted, priest-ridden peasant prisoners must be killed. This is a Brutus. On either side, in great struggles of races and principles, there have always appeared those terrible fanatics—Lantenacs, Cimourdain, Cromwells, Ziskas, Alvas. But on the other hand you have leaders like Gauvain, Paoli, or Garibaldi, equally full of love for the people, but clement, generous, more far-sighted through love. Now the terrible Cimourdain loves Gauvain like his own youngest and dearest child. The spirit of liberty and sympathy with the oppressed has passed from the tutor into the pupil; but here appears again the sad tragic irony of circumstance. The two inevitably clash upon this irreconcilable rock of difference in their natures. Gauvain is the frank, gallant, idealistic, beautiful young soldier; Cimourdain, the sombre, thin-lipped priest, hating his old creed and caste, self-devoted even to martyrdom, doing things for the miserable all others shrank from doing, yet still full of the fierce, fanatical, sacerdotal spirit of tyranny, enforcing his new creed with sanguinary violence. The Committee of Public Safety in Paris has deputed Cimourdain to watch Gauvain, as general of the Republican army in La Vendée, because Gauvain, being a noble, is suspected, and it is thought well to set an ex-priest to watch an ex-noble. We have a glimpse of the Convention, and of the principal figures that swayed the destinies of France at that terrible time. Robespierre, Danton, and Marat quarrel, and take counsel together. We see enough of them. But if there is impartiality in the representation of the several characters, there is not so much of it in the political dissertation of this part. Some rather wild and extravagant statements are made

such as Victor Hugo has not unwarrantably been accused of making when his imagination is much inflamed on a particular side ; as, for instance, when he talks about Paris being "centre of the universe." He calls the Convention "the summit of history, the Avatar of peoples." But this is to ignore the pre-Christian republics ; Buddhism in India ; Switzerland ; the Italian free states ; the Netherlands ; the Reformation in Germany ; the revival of learning ; especially our own long, steady campaign in favour of universal liberty, and progress of free, sound reason. Where tyranny has for ages eaten into the vitals of a race, when the yoke is thrown off there will too often appear excess, licence, extravagance, unreason, misnamed reason, social disorganization, Utopia, cruelty, the reign of the brute in man, the denial of the angel in him. There is good and right in such upheavings ; they are necessary ; they are helpful, as the cyclone and whirlwind are ; they constitute a stride in the true line of progress. Good fruit will be borne ; but there are sure to be superstitious reaction and retrogression, besides the loss of much that is all-important to human society. Violence begets violence. Civil stability and national sobriety are endangered. The calm, reverent, truly conservative progress of peoples is a higher and surer progress. Therefore this claim of the great Frenchman for his great revolution is immoderate.

The grand volume is the last. There is nothing more magnificent in modern literature. The two children, who have been taken as hostages by Lantenac, have been placed in the second story of the castle in an old library. And L'Imânus, the cruel, unscrupulous lieutenant of Lantenac, has proclaimed to the besiegers from the top of the tower, that unless the besieged be allowed to leave it safe and sound, he will fire the castle, and the children shall be burned. This condition, however, is refused, for Lantenac must not escape. The progress of the siege is elaborately described. The hand-to-hand, fierce, uproarious death-

combats by torchlight in each successively-defended vaulted chamber, and on the narrow spiral staircase of the tower, amid smoke and grime of gunpowder, these have all the *verve* and movement of Homer or Walter Scott. We hold our breaths, as the besiegers gain little by little upon the desperate defence; while, as a relief to the storm of rage and slaughter, the innocent play and prattle of those two little children in the library are elaborately recorded. It is a wonderful contrast. And never has the poet written more exquisitely of children than here. They talk, they laugh, they eat the simple food provided for them; they mimic the awful battle sounds faintly heard through the thick walls. They even smile at the terrible dawn of hell-fires that are to consume them; and then they slumber together in their cot, their rosy limbs and curly heads illumined by flame. But Gauvain has sent for a ladder, that every effort may be made to save them. Something like it is seen arriving; but, alas! no ladder! it is the guillotine for Lantenac. The sinister guillotine on the plateau opposite the castle rock, and the sinister old tower are thus brought face to face. Feudal privilege, darkness, superstition; cruelty, and the savage vengeance of revolution. Sergeant Radoub appears again. He climbs like a cat by a breach in the wall from the *rez-de-chaussée* to the first story. Here there is a wounded man of the garrison. The encounter between these two is most vividly described—Radoub, while fighting, jesting half-savagely in barrack-room, *sans-culotte* slang. The grim humour of this to-the-life relation artistically relieves the horror and gravity of the event. He finds up there arms laid ready for the besieged when they shall be driven to this story. Of them he makes the best use, till the besieged suppose that the enemy have somehow taken this chamber of the first floor; so they abandon it, together with that below, and rush up to the second story. Here the defenders barricade themselves, and receive absolution from their priest, thinking

their last hour arrived. Suddenly a great stone in the wall turns, and reveals a secret passage. Halmalo, the boatman, who alone had known of it, had used the knowledge to deliver them. He appears, and they are saved. But one person must remain to keep the foe in check, while the rest escape. L'Imânus remains. He kills many who try to force their way up, until through an aperture Radoub plunges a sword into his stomach, and springs into the chamber alone, surprised to find it apparently untenanted. L'Imânus, dying, has crept to the train of combustible materials his infernal ingenuity has laid, communicating with that more modern part of the building where the children are, and set it alight. Radoub in the twilight does not see any one; but a shot fired by the prostrate L'Imânus, grazing him, he says, "Mais si ! il y à quelqu'un ! Qui est ce qui à la bonté de me faire cette politesse ?"

Now the mother, Michelle Flechard, has been wandering on for many a league, to find her children at La Tourgue. The behaviour of the rough strange woman, driven to desperation among the frightened people of the country, who hardly dare assist her; her determined tramp onward, though she is nearly dying from weakness and fatigue; her first sight of the sombre tower reddened with sunset; all is inimitably real. She arrives at the summit of a rolling plateau that faces the castle, that faces, indeed, the library where her children are, though there is a profound, but very narrow ravine between this plateau and the rock on which the castle is built. As soon as she arrives there, the lower story of the castle begins to smoke, and a tongue of fire rushes out of the window. And by the glare of this flame she distinguishes in the library (for she can see into it)—her children—asleep! and the flames mounting toward them. "Elle jeta un cri effrayant. Ce cri de Michelle Flechard fut un hurlement. Hécube aboya, dit Homère." Now Lantenac (his companions having dispersed by his orders), issuing out of the secret passage, sees

between the trees this conflagration illumining the tower, and the poor woman, *hagard et lamentable*, bending over the ravine. He hears also her cry. " Cette figure, ce n'était plus Michelle Flechard ! c'était Gorgone. Les misérables sont les formidables. La paysanne s'était transfigurée en Euménide. Elle se dressait là, au bord de ce ravin, devant cet embrasement, devant ce crime, comme une puissance sepulcrale ; elle avait le cri de la bête, et le geste de la déesse : sa face, dont tombaient des imprécations semblait un masque de flamboiement. Rien de souverain comme l'éclair de ses yeux noyés de larmes ; son regard foudroyait l'incendie." Then he tells us what fell from this mother. And all I can say is that if one would have his mind set at rest, as to what is the true language of tragedy in supreme situations, the simple, or the ornate and recondite, let him read this and learn—for here it is. There is, indeed, one awful short phrase, and one only, in all her long prayer and cry of agony, that descends to terrible depths, or rises into sublime heights of imagination : " O ! s'ils devaient mourir comme cela, je tuerais Dieu ! " One only means there is of saving them—a huge iron door of communication between the second story of the tower, and the second story of the modern castle, built upon arches thrown across the ravine, where the children are. It cannot be stove in. And one alone has the key of it—Lantenac ! Now Lantenac heard and saw the mother's awful despair—he thought of the little children—he re-entered the secret passage, and appeared among the astonished victors in the tower, who were vainly thundering at the iron door. He calmly opened it, and passed into the flames, the floor crumbling to ashes behind him. The children, awake, were admiring the ruddy glow, but feeling the great heat, were calling " Maman ! " out of window, seeing her, while she frantically shrieked their names. Lantenac brought a ladder (kept in the castle) and reached it out of one of the windows—Raboub and the besiegers mounting to form a

human chain up the rungs of the ladder. To the first of them the marquis hands one child ; then he hands another. Of the youngest, Georgette, two years old only, he inquires her name. She answers with a lisp and a smile : the fierce old man kisses her. Then Lantenac slowly and majestically descends the ladder amid the flames. (Hugo has an eye always to picturesque, grandiose external effect.) Arrived at the bottom, Cimourdain arrests him, and confines him in his own dungeon. But Gauvain meditates that night, pacing to and fro before the prison. The sense of family ties comes over him ; he is full of admiration and surprised delight that, even in Lantenac, the light of love has dawned, so as to cause him to sacrifice himself for these little ones ; he cannot bear that this act should bring him to death. Shall the righteous republic be so implacable? Long he debates with himself, feeling also how much there is to be said in favour of severity in this particular case ; but finally he enters the prison, intending to remain there in place of his relative. The marquis, on first seeing him, speaks at great length to him with bitter upbraiding frankness about existing complications and events, both public and private. You can hear the cold, half-jesting, sarcastic, yet indignantly eloquent, proud nobleman of the old school in every word. All is a perfect revelation of the character, and of the aristocratic idea. Hugo himself, be it remembered, has been in early life a royalist, and is of noble family. Before Lantenac half understands what his nephew is about, he finds himself pushed into the open air, disguised as Gauvain. Then, when the moment for Lantenac's trial comes on, Gauvain appears before the tribunal, to be judged in his place. Cimourdain trembles, and turns pale. He cannot believe Gauvain's own confession. But Gauvain has come to see that he was wrong ; he has released a mortal enemy of his country ; and he asks to expiate his fault, and make atonement, by himself submitting to the penalty of the guillotine. Radoub delivers a generous speech in his

favour ; the blunt old sergeant, in his half-humorous, half-earnest way, declares Lantenac and Gauvain have both done right, and that Gauvain ought to be promoted to the highest rank in the republic rather than be executed. His strange, rude protestations, garnished with extraordinary oaths, make one smile in the midst of tears. But Cimourdain gives the casting vote of president in favour of *death*. Before the execution, he has a last interview with his dear child and pupil, whom he loves best in the world. But he has sworn to the Committee of Public Safety that, in such an event as the present, he would show no mercy. He is Brutus. Yet the two men converse on great principles by night in the dungeon—Gauvain quite calm, and reconciled to his fate. What Gauvain enounces for his own noble, hopeful beliefs, are doubtless those of the poet. The army that adores him would fain grant him pardon, but Cimourdain is inexorable. At the moment when the axe of the guillotine falls, the report of a pistol is heard ; and Cimourdain, who has been watching, cold and rigid as fate or death, falls dead himself. He has done his duty, but he cannot survive his darling child. “Et ces deux âmes, sœurs tragiques, s’envolèrent ensemble, l’ombre de l’une mêlée à la lumière de l’autre.”

Since I wrote this, now some years ago, the great poet of Europe too has entered into what he once called “la grande lueur.”

THE POETRY OF TENNYSON.

IT is perhaps difficult for men of middle age to estimate Tennyson aright. For we who love poetry were brought up, as it were, at his feet, and he cast the magic of his fascination over our youth. We have gone away, we have travelled in other lands, absorbed in other preoccupations, often revolving problems different from those concerning which we took counsel with him ; and we hear new voices, claiming authority, who aver that our old master has been superseded, that he has no message for a new generation, that his voice is no longer a talisman of power. Then we return to the country of our early love, and what shall our report be? Each one must answer for himself ; but my report will be entirely loyal to those early and dear impressions. I am of those who believe that Tennyson has still a message for the world. Men become impatient with hearing Aristides so often called just, but is that the fault of Aristides? They are impatient also with a reputation, which necessarily is what all great reputations must so largely be—the empty echo of living voices from blank walls. “Now again”—not the people, but certain critics—“call it but a weed.” Yet how strange these fashions in poetry are! I well remember Lord Broughton, Byron’s friend, expressing to me, when I was a boy, his astonishment that the bust of Tennyson by Woolner should have been thought worthy of a place near that of Lord Byron in Trinity College, Cambridge. “Lord Byron was a great

poet ; but Mr. Tennyson, though he had written pretty verses," and so on. For one thing, the men of that generation deemed Tennyson terribly obscure. "In Memoriam," it was held, nobody could possibly understand. The poet, being original, had to make his own public. Men nurtured on Scott and Byron could not comprehend him. Now we hear no more of his obscurity. Moreover, he spoke as the mouthpiece of his own time. Doubts, aspirations, visions unfamiliar to the aging, breathed melodiously through him. Again, how contemptuously do Broad-church psychologists like George Macdonald, and writers for the *Spectator*, as well as literary persons belonging to what I may term the *finikin* school, on the other hand, now talk of our equally great poet Byron. How detestable must the North be, if the South be so admirable ! But while Tennyson spoke to me in youth, Byron spoke to me in boyhood, and I still love both.

Whatever may have to be discounted from the popularity of Tennyson on account of fashion and a well-known name, or on account of his harmony with the (more or less provincial) ideas of the large majority of Englishmen, his popularity is a fact of real benefit to the public, and highly creditable to them at the same time. The establishment of his name in popular favour is but very partially accounted for by the circumstance that, when he won his spurs, he was among younger singers the only serious champion in the field, since, if I mistake not, he was at one time a less "popular" poet than Mr. Robert Montgomery. *Vox populi* is not always *vox Dei*, but it may be so accidentally, and then the people reap benefit from their happy blunder. The great poet who won the laurel before Tennyson has never been "popular" at all, and Tennyson is the only true English poet who has pleased the "public" since Byron, Walter Scott, Tom Moore, and Mrs. Hemans. But he had to conquer their suffrages, for his utterance, whatever he may have owed to Keats, was original, and

his substance the outcome of an opulent and profound personality. These were serious obstacles to success, for he neither went "deep" into "the general heart" like Burns, nor appealed to superficial sentiments in easy language like Scott, Moore, Byron, and since, Longfellow. In his earliest volume indeed there was a preponderance of manner over matter; it was characterized by a certain dainty prettiness of style, that scarcely gave promise of the high spiritual vision and rich complexity of human insight to which he has since attained, though it did manifest a delicate feeling for Nature in association with human moods, an extraordinarily subtle sensibility of all senses, and a luscious pictorial power. Not *Endymion* had been more luxuriant. All was steeped in golden languors. There were faults in plenty, and of course the critics, faithful to the instincts of their kind, were jubilant to nose them. To adapt Coleridge's funny verses, not "the Church of St. Geryon," nor the legendary Rhine, but the "stinks and stench" of Kōlntown do such offal-feeders love to enumerate, and distinguish. But the poet in his verses on "Musty Christopher" gave one of these people a Roland for his Oliver. Stuart Mill, as Mr. Mathews, in his lately published and very instructive lecture on Tennyson, points out, was the one critic in a million who remembered Pope's precept—

"Be thou the first true merit to befriend,
His praise is lost who waits till all commend."

Yet it is only natural that the mediocrities, who for a moment keep the door of Fame, should scrutinize with somewhat jaundiced eye the credentials of new aspirants, since every entry adds fresh bitterness to their own exclusion.

But really it is well for us, the poet's elect lovers, to remember that he once had faults, however few he may now retain; for the perverse generation who dance not when the poet pipes to them, nor mourn when he weeps,

have turned upon Tennyson with the cry that he "is all fault who has no fault at all"—they would have us regard him as a kind of Andrea del Sarto, a "blameless" artistic "monster," a poet of unimpeachable technical skill, but keeping a certain dead level of moderate merit. It is as well to be reminded that this at all events is false. The dawn of his young art was beautiful; but the artist had all the generous faults of youthful genius—excess, vision confused with gorgeous colour and predominant sense, too palpable artifice of diction, indistinctness of articulation in the outline, intricately-woven cross-lights flooding the canvas, defect of living interest; while Coleridge said that he began to write poetry without an ear for metre. Neither Adeline, Madeline, nor Eleanore are living portraits, though Eleanore is gorgeously painted. "The Ode to Memory" has isolated images of rare beauty, but it is kaleidoscopic in effect; the fancy is playing with loose foam-wreaths, rather than the imagination "taking things by the heart." But our great poet has gone beyond these. He has himself rejected twenty-six out of the fifty-eight poems published in his first volume; while some of those even in the second have been altogether rewritten. Such defects are eminently present in the lately republished poem written in youth, "The Lover's Tale," though this too has been altered. As a storehouse of fine imagery, metaphor, and deftly moulded phrase, of blank verse also whose sonorous rhythm must surely be a fabric of adult architecture, the piece can hardly be surpassed; but the tale as tale lingers and lapses, over-weighted with the too gorgeous trappings under which it so laboriously moves. And such expression as the following, though not un-Shakespearian, is hardly quarried from the soundest material in Shakespeare—for, after all, Shakespeare was a euphuist now and then—

" Why fed we from one fountain? drew one sun?
Why were our mothers branches of one stem,
If that same nearness

Were father to this distance, and that *one*
Vaunt courier to this *double*, if affection
Living slew love, and sympathy hewed out
The bosom-sepulchre of sympathy ?”

Yet “Mariana” had the virtue, which the poet has displayed so pre-eminently since, of concentration. Every subtle touch enhances the effect he intends to produce, that of the desolation of the deserted woman, whose hope is nearly extinguished ; Nature hammering a fresh nail into her coffin with every innocent aspect or movement. Beautiful too, are “Love and Death” and “The Poet’s Mind ;” while in “The Poet” we have the oft-quoted line: “Dowered with the hate of hate, the scorn of scorn, the love of love.”

Mr. G. Brimley was the first, I believe, to point out the distinctive peculiarity of Lord Tennyson’s treatment of landscape. It is treated by him dramatically ; that is to say, the details of it are selected so as to be interpretative of the particular mood or emotion he wishes to represent. Thus, in the two Marianas, they are painted with the minute distinctness appropriate to the morbid and sickening observation of the lonely woman, whose attention is distracted by no cares, pleasures, or satisfied affections. That is a pregnant remark, a key to unlock a good deal of Tennyson’s work with. Byron and Shelley, though they are carried out of themselves in contemplating Nature, do not, I think, often take her as interpreter of moods alien to their own. In Wordsworth’s “Excursion,” it is true, Margaret’s lonely grief is thus delineated through the neglect of her garden and the surroundings of her cottage ; yet this is not so characteristic a note of his Nature-poetry. In the “Miller’s Daughter” and the “Gardener’s Daughter” the lovers would be little indeed without the associated scene so germane to the incidents narrated, both as congenial setting of the picture for a spectator, and as virtually fused with the emotion of the lovers ; while never was more lovely landscape-painting of the gentle order than in

the "Gardener's Daughter." Lessing, who says that poetry ought never to be pictorial, would, I suppose, much object to Tennyson's; but to me, I confess, this mellow, lucid, luminous word-painting of his is entirely delightful. It refutes the criticism that words cannot convey a picture by perfectly conveying it. *Solvitur ambulando*; the Gardener's Daughter standing by her rose-bush, "a sight to make an old man young," remaining in our vision to confound all crabbed pedants with pet theories.

In his second volume, indeed, the poet's art was well mastered, for here we find "The Lotos-eaters," "Ænone," "The Palace of Art," "A Dream of Fair Women," the tender "May-Queen," and the "Lady of Shalott." Perhaps the first four of these are among the very finest works of Tennyson. In the mouth of the love-lorn nymph, Ænone, he places the complaint concerning Paris into which there enters so much delightful picture of the scenery around Mount Ida, and of those fair immortals who came to be judged by the beardless apple-arbiter. How deliciously flows the verse!—though probably it flows still more entrancingly in "The Lotos-eaters," wandering there like clouds of fragrant incense, or some slow heavy honey, or a rare amber unguent poured out. How wonderfully harmonious with the dream-mood of the dreamers are phrase, image, and measure! But we need not quote the lovely choric song wherein occur the lines—

"Music that gentler on the spirit lies
Than tired eyelids upon tired eyes."

so entirely restful and happy in their simplicity. If Art would always blossom so, she might be forgiven if she blossomed only for her own sake; yet this controversy regarding *Art for Art* need hardly have arisen, since Art may certainly bloom for her own sake, if only she consent to assimilate in her blooming, and so exhale for her votaries, in due proportion, all elements essential to Nature, and Humanity; for in the highest artist all faculties are trans-

figured into one supreme organ ; while among forms her form is the most consummate, among fruits her fruit offers the most satisfying refreshment. What a delicately true picture have we here—

“ And like a downward smoke, the slender stream
Along the cliff to fall, and pause, and fall did seem.”

where we feel also the poet's remarkable faculty of making word and rhythm an echo and auxiliary of the sense. Not only have we the three cæsuras respectively after “fall,” and “pause” and “fall,” but the length, and soft amplitude of the vowel sounds, with liquid consonant, said in the realization of the picture, reminding of Milton's beautiful “From morn to noon he fell, from noon to dewy eve, a summer's day.” The same faculty is notable in the rippling lilt of the charming little “Brook” song, and indeed everywhere. In the “Dream of Fair Women” we have a series of cabinet portraits, presenting a situation of human interest with a few animating touches, but still chiefly through suggestive surroundings. There occurs the magnificent phrase of Cleopatra : “We drank the Lybian sun to sleep, and lit Lamps which outburned Canopus.” The force of expression could be carried no further than throughout this poem, and by “expression” of course I do not mean pretty words, or power-words for their own sweet sake, for these, expressing nothing, whatever else they may be, are not “expression ;” but I mean the forcible or felicitous presentment of thought, image, feeling, or incident, through pregnant and beautiful language in harmony with them ; though the subtle and indirect suggestion of language is unquestionably an element to be taken into account by poetry. The “Palace of Art” is perhaps equal to the former poem for lucid splendour of description, in this instance pointing a moral, allegorizing a truth. Scornful pride, intellectual arrogance, selfish absorption in æsthetic enjoyment, is imaged forth in this vision of the

queen's world-reflecting palace, and its various treasures—the end being a sense of unendurable isolation, engendering madness, but at last repentance, and reconciliation with the scouted commonalty of mankind.

The dominant note of Tennyson's poetry is assuredly the delineation of human moods modulated by Nature, and through a system of Nature-symbolism. Thus, in "Elaine," when Lancelot has sent a courtier to the queen, asking her to grant him audience, that he may present the diamonds won for her in tourney, she receives the messenger with unmoved dignity; but he, bending low and reverently before her, saw "with a sidelong eye"

"The shadow of some piece of pointed lace
In the queen's shadow vibrate on the walls,
And parted, laughing in his courtly heart."

The "Morte d'Arthur" affords a striking instance of this peculiarly Tennysonian method. That is another of the very finest pieces. Such poetry may suggest labour, but not more than does the poetry of Virgil or Milton. Every word is the right word, and each in the right place. Sir H. Taylor, indeed, warns poets against "wanting to make every word beautiful." And yet here it must be owned that the result of such an effort is successful, so delicate has become the artistic tact of this poet in his maturity.* For, good expression being the happy adaptation of language to meaning, it follows that sometimes good expression will be perfectly simple, even ordinary in character, and sometimes it will be ornate, elaborate, dignified. He who can thus vary his language is the best verbal artist, and Tennyson can thus vary it. In this

* But the loveliest lyrics of Tennyson do not suggest labour. I do not say that, like Beethoven's music, or Heine's songs, they may not be the result of it. But they, like all supreme artistic work, "conceal," not obtrude Art; if they are not spontaneous, they produce the effect of spontaneity, not artifice. They impress the reader also with the power, for which no technical skill can be a substitute, of sincere feeling, and profound realization of their subject-matter.

poem, the "Morte d'Arthur," too, we have "deep-chested music." Except in some of Wordsworth and Shelley, or in the magnificent "Hyperion" of Keats, we have had no such stately, sonorous organ-music in English verse since Milton as in this poem, or in "Tithonus," "Ulysses," "Lucretius," and "Guinevere." From the majestic overture—

"So all day long the noise of battle rolled
Among the mountains by the winter sea,"

onward to the end, the same high elevation is maintained.

But this very picturesqueness of treatment has been urged against Tennyson as a fault in his narrative pieces generally, from its alleged over-luxuriance, and tendency to absorb, rather than enhance, the higher human interest of character and action. However this be (and I think it is an objection that does apply, for instance, to "The Princess"), here in this poem picturesqueness must be counted as a merit, because congenial to the semi-mythical, ideal, and parabolic nature of Arthurian legend, full of portent and supernatural suggestion. Such Ossianic hero-forms are nearly as much akin to the elements as to man. And the same answer holds largely in the case of the other Arthurian Idylls. It has been noted how well-chosen is the epithet "water" applied to a lake in the lines, "On one side lay the ocean, and on one Lay a great water, and the moon was full." Why is this so happy? For as a rule the concrete rather than the abstract is poetical, because the former brings with it an image, and the former involves no vision. But now in the night all Sir Bedevere could observe, or care to observe, was that there was "some great water." We do not—he did not—want to know exactly what it was. Other thoughts, other cares, pre-occupy him and us. Again, of dying Arthur, we are told that "all his greaves and cuisses were dashed with drops of onset." "Onset" is a very generic term, poetic because

removed from all vulgar associations of common parlance, and vaguely suggestive not only of war's pomp and circumstance, but of high deeds also, and heroic hearts, since onset belongs to mettle and daring; the word for vast and shadowy connotation is akin to Milton's grand abstraction, "Far off *His coming* shone," or Shelley's, "Where the Earthquake Demon taught her young *Ruin*."

It has been noted also how cunningly Tennyson can gild and furbish up the most commonplace detail—as when he calls Arthur's moustache "the knightly growth that fringed his lips," or condescends to glorify a pigeon-pie, or paints the clown's astonishment by this detail, "the brawny spearman let his cheek Bulge with the unswallowed piece, and turning stared;" or thus characterizes a pun, "and took the word, and play'd upon it, and made it of two colours." This kind of ingenuity, indeed, belongs rather to talent than to genius; it is exercised in cold blood; but talent may be a valuable auxiliary of genius, perfecting skill in the technical departments of art. Yet such a gift is not without danger to the possessor. It may tempt him to make his work too much like a delicate mosaic of costly stone, too hard and unblended, from excessive elaboration of detail. One may even prefer to art thus highly wrought a more glowing and careless strain, that lifts us off our feet, and carries us away as on a more rapid, if more turbid torrent of inspiration, such as we find in Byron, Shelley, or Victor Hugo. Here you are compelled to pause at every step, and admire the design of the costly tessellated pavement under your feet. Perhaps there is a jewelled glitter, a Pre-Raphaelite or Japanese minuteness of finish here and there in Tennyson, that takes away from the feeling of aerial perspective and remote distance, leaving little to the imagination; not suggesting and whetting the appetite, but rather satiating it: his loving observation of minute particulars is so faithful, his knowledge of what others, even men of science,

have observed so accurate, his fancy so nimble in the detection of similitudes. But every master has his own manner, and his reverent disciples would be sorry if he could be without it. We love the little idiosyncrasies of our friends.

I have said the objection in question does seem to lie against "The Princess." It contains some of the most beautiful poetic pearls the poet has ever dropped ; but the manner appears rather disproportionate to the matter, at least to the subject as he has chosen to regard it. For it is regarded by him only semi-seriously ; so lightly and sportively is the whole topic viewed at the outset, that the effect is almost that of burlesque ; yet there is a very serious conclusion, and a very weighty moral is drawn from the story, the workmanship being laboured to a degree, and almost encumbered with ornamentation. But the poet himself admits the ingrained incongruity of the poem. The fine comparison of the Princess Ida in the battle to a beacon glaring ruin over raging seas, for instance, seems too grand for the occasion. How differently, and in what burning earnest has a great poet-woman, Mrs. Browning, treated this grave modern question of the civil and political position of women in "Aurora Leigh !" Tennyson's is essentially a man's view, and the frequent talk about women's beauty must be very aggravating to the "Blues." It is this poem especially that gives people with a limited knowledge of Tennyson the idea of a "pretty" poet ; the prettiness, though very genuine, seems to play too patronizingly with a momentous theme. The Princess herself, and the other figures are indeed dramatically realized, but the splendour of invention, and the dainty detail, rather dazzle the eye away from their humanity. Here, however, are some of the loveliest songs that this poet, one of our supreme lyrists, ever sung : "Tears, idle tears !" "The splendour falls," "Sweet and low," "Home they brought," "Ask me no more," and the exquisite melody, "For Love

is of the valley." Moreover, the grand lines toward the close are full of wisdom—

" For woman is not undeveloped man,
But diverse : could we make her as the man
Sweet love were slain," etc.

I feel myself a somewhat similar incongruity in the poet's treatment of his more homely, modern, half-humorous themes, such as the introduction to the "Morte d'Arthur," and "Will Waterproof;" not at all in the humorous poems, like the "Northern Farmer," which are all of a piece, and perfect in their own vein. In this introduction we have "The host and I sat round the wassail bowl, then half-way ebb'd;" but this metaphorical style is not (fortunately) sustained, and so, as good luck would have it, a metaphor not being ready to hand, we have the honester and homelier line, "Till I tired out with cutting eights that day upon the pond;" yet this homespun hardly agrees with the above stage-king costume. And so again I often venture to wish that the Poet-Laureate would not say "flowed" when he only means "said." Still, this may be hypercriticism. For I did not personally agree with the critic who objected to Enoch Arden's fish-basket being called "ocean-smelling osier." There is no doubt, however, that "Stokes, and Nokes, and Vokes" have exaggerated the poet's manner, till the "murex fished up" by Keats and Tennyson has become one universal flare of purple. Beautiful as some of Mr. Rossetti's work is, his expression in the sonnets surely became obscure from over-involution, and excessive *floriture* of diction. But then Rossetti's style is no doubt formed considerably upon that of the Italian poets. One is glad, however, that, this time, at all events, the right man has "got the porridge."

In connection with "Morte d'Arthur," I may draw attention again to Lord Tennyson's singular skill in producing a rhythmical response to the sense :—

“The great brand
Made lightnings in the splendour of the moon,
And flashing round and round, and whirled in an arch.”

Here the anapest instead of the iambic in the last place happily imitates the sword Excalibur's own gyration in the air. Then what admirable wisdom does the legend, opening out into parable, disclose toward the end! When Sir Bedevere laments the passing away of the Round Table, and Arthur's noble peerage, gone down in doubt, distrust, treachery, and blood, after that last great battle in the West, when, amid the death-white mist, “confusion fell even upon Arthur,” and “friend slew friend, not knowing whom he slew,” how grandly comes the answer of Arthur from the mystic barge, that bears him from the visible world to “some far island valley of Avilion,” “The old order changeth, yielding place to new, And God fulfils Himself in many ways, Lest one good custom should corrupt the world!” The new commencement of this poem, called in the idyls “The Passing of Arthur,” is well worthy of the conclusion. How weirdly expressive is that last battle in the mist of those hours of spiritual perplexity, which overcloud even strongest natures and firmest faith, overshadowing whole communities, when we know not friend from foe, the holiest hope seems doomed to disappointment, all the great aim and work of life have failed; even loyalty to the highest is no more; the fair polity built laboriously by some god-like spirit dissolves, and “all his realm reels back into the beast;” while men “falling down in death” look up to heaven only to find cloud, and the great-toned ocean, as it were Destiny without love and without mind, with voice of days of old and days to be, shakes the world, wastes the narrow kingdom, yea, beats upon the faces of our dead! The world-sorrow pierces here through the strain of a poet usually calm and contented. Yet “Arthur shall come again, aye, twice as fair;” for the spirit of man is young immortally.

Who, moreover, has moulded for us phrases of more transcendent dignity, of more felicitous grace and import, phrases, epithets, and lines that have already become memorable household words? More magnificent expression I cannot conceive than that of such poems as "Lucretius," "Tithonus," "Ulysses." These all for versification, language, luminous picture, harmony of structure have never been surpassed. What pregnant brevity, weight, and majesty of expression in the lines where Lucretius characterizes the death of his namesake, Lucretia, ending "and from it sprang the commonwealth, which breaks, as I am breaking now!" Here is masterly power in poetically embodying a materialistic philosophy, congenial to modern science, yet in absolute dramatic keeping with the actual thought of the Roman poet, and at the same time, strong grasp of the terrible conflict of passion with reason, two natures in one, significant for all epochs! In "Tithonus" and "Ulysses" we find embodiments in high-born verse and illustrious word of ideal moods, adventurous peril-affronting Enterprise contemptuously tolerant of tame household virtues in "Ulysses," and the bane of a burdensome immortality, become incapable even of love, in "Tithonus." Any personification more exquisite than that of Aurora in the latter were inconceivable.

M. Taine, in his "Littérature Anglaise," represents Tennyson as an idyllic poet (a charming one), comfortably settled among his rhododendrons on an English lawn, and viewing the world through the somewhat insular medium of a prosperous, domestic, and virtuous member of the English comfortable classes, as also of a man of letters who has fully succeeded. Again, either M. Taine, M. Scherer, or some other writer in the "Revue des Deux Mondes," pictures him, like his own Lady of Shalott, viewing life not as it really is, but reflected in the magic mirror of his own recluse fantasy. Now, whatever measure of truth there may formerly have been in such conceptions, they

have assuredly now proved quite one-sided and inadequate. We have only to remember "Maud," the stormier poems of the "Idyls," "Lucretius," "Rizpah," the "Vision of Sin." The recent poem "Rizpah" perhaps marks the high-water mark of the Laureate's genius, and proves henceforward beyond all dispute his wide range, his command over the deeper-toned and stormier themes of human music, as well as over the gentler and more serene. It proves also that the venerable master's hand has not lost its cunning, rather that he has been even growing until now, having become more profoundly sympathetic with the world of action, and the common growth of human sorrows. "Rizpah" is certainly one of the strongest, most intensely felt, and graphically realized dramatic poems in the language; its pathos is almost overwhelming. There is nothing more tragic in "Ædipus," "Antigone," or "Lear." And what a strong Saxon homespun language has the veteran poet found for these terrible lamentations of half-demented agony, "My Baby! the bones that had sucked me, the bones that had laughed and had cried, Theirs! O no! They are mine, not theirs—they had moved in my side." Then the heart-gripping phrase breaking forth ever and anon in some imaginative metaphorical utterance of wild emotion, to which the sons and daughters of the people are often moved, eloquent beyond all eloquence, white-hot from the heart! "Dust to dust low down! let us hide! but they set him so high, That all the ships of the world could stare at him passing by." In this last book of ballads the style bears the same relation to the earlier and daintier that the style of "Samson Agonistes" bears to that of "Comus." "The Revenge" is equally masculine, simple, and sinewy in appropriate strength of expression, a most spirited rendering of a heroic naval action—worthy of a place, as is also the grand ode on the death of Wellington, beside the war odes of Campbell, the "Agincourt" of Drayton, and the "Rule Britannia" of Thomson. The irregular

metre of the "Ballad of the Fleet" is most remarkable as a vehicle of the sense, resonant with din of battle, full-voiced with rising and bursting storm toward the close, like the equally spirited concluding scenes of "Harold," that depict the battle of Senlac. The dramatic characterizations in "Harold," "Queen Mary," and "Becket," are excellent—Mary, Harold, the Conqueror, the Confessor, Pole, Edith, Stigand, and other subordinate sketches, being striking and successful portraits; while "Harold" is full also of incident and action—a really memorable modern play; and there are scenes of great power in "Becket;" but the main motive of "Queen Mary" fails in tragic dignity and interest, though there is about it a certain grim subdued pathos, as of still life, and there are some notable scenes. Tennyson is admirably dramatic in the portrayal of individual moods, of men or women in certain given situations. His plays are fine, and of real historic interest, but not nearly so remarkable as the dramatic poems I have named, as the earlier "St. Simeon Stylites," "Ulysses," "Tithonus," or as the "Northern Farmers," "Cobblers," and "Village Wife," among his later works. These last are perfectly marvellous in their fidelity and humorous photographic realism. That the poet of "Enone," "The Lotus-eaters," and the Arthur cycle should have done these also is wonderful. The humour of them is delightful, and the rough homely diction perfect. One wishes indeed that the "dramatic fragments" collected by Lamb, like gold-dust out of the rather dreary sand-expanse of Elizabethan playwrights, were so little fragmentary as these. Tennyson's short dramatic poems are quintessential; in a brief glimpse he contrives to reveal the whole man or woman. You would know the old "Northern Farmer," with his reproach to "God Amoighty" for not "letting him aloan," and the odious farmer of the new style, with his "Proputty! Proputty!" wherever you met them. But "Dora," the "Grandmother," "Lady Clare," "Edward Gray," "Lord of

Burleigh," had long since proved that Tennyson had more than one style at command ; that he was master not only of a flamboyant, a Corinthian, but also of a sweet, simple, limpid English, worthy of Goldsmith or Cowper at their best.

Reverting, however, to the question of Tennyson's ability to fathom the darker recesses of our nature, what shall be said of the "Vision of Sin?" For myself I can only avow that, whenever I read it, I feel as if some horrible grey fungus of the grave were growing over my heart, and over all the world around me. As for passion, I know few more profoundly passionate poems than "Love and Duty." It paints with glowing concentrated power the conflict of duty with yearning passionate love, stronger than death. The "Sisters," and "Fatima," too, are fiercely passionate, as also is "Maud." I should be surprised to hear that a lover could read "Maud," and not feel the spring and mid-noon of passionate affection in it to the very core of him, so profoundly felt and gloriously expressed are they by the poet. Much of its power, again, is derived from that peculiarly Tennysonian ability to make Nature herself reflect, redouble, and interpret the human feeling. That is the power also of such supreme lyrics as "Break, break!" and "In the Valley of Caerterets": such chaste and consummate rendering of a noble woman's self-sacrifice as "Godiva," wherein "shameless gargoyles" stare, but "the still air scarcely breathes for fear;" and likewise of "Come into the garden, Maud," an invocation that palpitates with rapture of young love, in which the sweet choir of flowers bear their part, and sing antiphony. The same feeling pervades the delicious passage commencing, "Is that enchanted moon?" and "Go not, happy day." All this may be what Mr. Ruskin condemns as "pathetic fallacy," but it is inevitable and right. For "in our life doth Nature live, ours is her wedding garment, ours her shroud." The same Divine Spirit pervades man and Nature; she, like ourselves, has

her transient moods, as well as her tranquil, immovable deeps. In her, too, is a passing as well as an eternal, while we apprehend either according to our own capacity, together with the emotional bias that dominates us at the moment. The vital and permanent in us holds the vital and permanent in her, while the temporary in us mirrors the transitory in her. I cannot think, indeed, that the more troubled and jarring moods of disharmony and fury are touched with quite the same degree of mastery in "Maud" as are the sunnier and happier. Tennyson hitherto had basked by preference in the brighter regions of his art, and the turbid Byronic vein appeared rather unexpectedly in him. The tame, sleek, daintily feeding *gourmets* of criticism yelped, indeed, their displeasure at these "hysterics," as they termed the "Sturm und Drang" elements that appeared in "Maud," especially since the poet dared appropriately to body these forth in somewhat harsh, abrupt language, and irregular metres. Such elements, in truth, hardly seemed so congenial to him as to Byron or Hugo. Yet they were welcome, as proving that our chief poet was not altogether irresponsible to the terrible social problems around him, to the corruptions, and ever-festering vices of the body politic, to the doubt, denial, and grim symptoms of upheaval at his very doors. For on the whole some of us had felt that the Poet-Laureate was almost too well contented with the general framework of things, with the prescriptive rights of long-unchallenged rule, and hoar comfortable custom, especially in England, as though these were in very deed divine, and no subterranean thunder were ever heard, even in this favoured isle, threatening Church and State, and the very fabric of society. But the temper of his class and time spoke through him. Did not all men rejoice greatly when Prince Albert opened the Exhibition of 1851; when Cobden and the Manchester school won the battle of free-trade; when steam-engines and the electric telegraph were invented; when Wordsworth's "glorious time" came, and the Revised

Code passed into law ; when science first told her enchanting fairy tales ? Yet the Millennium tarries, and there is an exceeding "bitter cry."

But in "Maud," as, indeed, before in that fine sonorous chant, "Locksley Hall," and later in "Aylmer's Field," the poet's emphasis of appreciation is certainly reserved for the heroes, men who have inherited a strain of gloom, or ancestral disharmony moral and physical, within whom the morbid social humours break forth inevitably into plague-spots ; the injustice and irony of circumstance lash them into revolt, wrath, and madness. Mr. R. H. Hutton remarks that "'Maud' was written to reprobate hysterics." But I fear—nay, I hope and believe—that we cannot credit the poet with any such virtuous or didactic intention in the present instance, though of course the pregnant lines beginning "Of old sat Freedom on the heights," the royal verses, the recent play so forcibly objected to by Lord Queensberry, together with various allusions to the "red fool-fury of the Seine," and "blind hysterics of the Celt," do indicate a very Conservative and law-abiding attitude. But other lines prove that after all what he mostly deprecates is "the falsehood of extremes," the blind and hasty plunge into measures of mere destruction ; for he praises the statesmen who "take occasion by the hand," and make "the bounds of freedom wider yet," and even gracefully anticipates "the golden year."

The same principle on which I have throughout insisted as the key to most of Tennyson's best poetry is the key also to the moving tale "Enoch Arden," where the tropical island around the solitary shipwrecked mariner is gorgeously depicted, the picture being as full-Venetian, and resplendent in colour, as those of the "Day-Dream" and "Arabian Nights." But the conclusion of the tale is profoundly moving and pathetic, and relates a noble act of self-renouncement. Parts of "Aylmer's Field," too, are powerful.

And now we come to the "Idyls," around which no little critical controversy has raged. It has been charged against them that they are more picturesque, scenic, and daintily wrought than human in their interest. But though assuredly the poet's love for the picturesque is in this noble epic—for epic the Idyls in their completed state may be accounted—amply indulged, I think it is seldom to the detriment of the human interest, and the remark I made about one of them, the "Morte d'Arthur," really applies to all. The Arthur cycle is not historical, as "Harold" or "Queen Mary" is, where the style is often simple almost to baldness; the whole of it belongs to the reign of myth, legend, fairy story, and parable. Ornament, image, and picture are as much appropriate here as in Spenser's "Fairy Queen," of which, indeed, Tennyson's poem often reminds me. But "the light that never was on sea or land, the consecration and the poet's dream," are a new revelation, made peculiarly in modern poetry of true spiritual insight. And this not only throws fresh illuminating light into Nature, but deepens also and enlarges our comprehension of man. If Nature be known for a symbol and embodiment of the soul's life, by means of their analogies in Nature, the human heart and mind may be more profoundly understood; while human emotions win a double dearness, or an added sorrow, from their fellowship and association with outward scenes. Nature can only be fathomed through her consanguinity with our own desires, aspirations, and fears, while these again become defined and articulate by means of her related appearances. A poet, then, who is sensitive to such analogies confers a two-fold benefit upon us.

I cannot at all assent to the criticism passed upon the Idyls by Mr. John Morley, who has indeed, as it appears to me, somewhat imperilled his critical reputation by the observation that they are "such little pictures as might adorn a lady's school." When we think of

“Guinevere,” “Vivien,” the “Holy Grail,” the “Passing of Arthur,” this dictum seems to lack point and penetration. Indeed, had it proceeded only from some rhyming criticaster, alternating with the feeble puncture of his sting the worrying iteration of his own doleful drone, it might have been passed over as simply an impertinence.* But while the poem is in part purely a fairy romance tinctured with humanity, Tennyson has certainly intended to treat the subject in part also as a grave spiritual parable. Arthur, Guinevere, Lancelot, Elaine, Galahad, Vivien, are types, gracious or hateful. My own feeling, therefore, would rather be that there is too much human nature in the Idyls, than that there is too little; or at any rate that, while Arthur remains a mighty Shadow, whose coming and going are attended with supernatural portents, a worthy symbol of the Spirit of divine humanity, Vivien, for instance, is a too real and unlovely harlot, too gross and veritably breathing, to be in proportionate harmony with the general design. Lancelot and Guinevere, again, being far fuller of life and colour than Arthur, the situation between these three, as invented, or at least as recast from the old legends in his own fashion by the poet, does not seem artistically felicitous, if regarded as a representation of an actual occurrence in human life. But so vivid and human are many of the stories that we can hardly fail so to regard them. And if the common facts of life are made the vehicle of a parable, they must not be distorted. It is chiefly, I think, because Arthur and Merlin are only seen, as it were, through the luminous haze appropriate to romance and myth, that the main motive of the epic, the loves of Lancelot and Guinevere, appears scarcely strong enough to bear the weight of momentous consequence imposed on it, which is no less than the retributive ruin of

* Mr. Alfred Austin, himself a true poet and critic, has long ago repented of *his* juvenile escapade in criticism, and made ample amends to the Poet-Laureate in a very able article published not long since in *Macmillan's Magazine*.

Arthur's commonwealth. Now, if Art elects to appeal to ethical instinct, as great, human, undegraded Art continually must, she is even more bound, in pursuance of her own proper end, to satisfy the demand for moral beauty, than to gratify the taste for beauty intellectual or æsthetic. And of course, while you might flatter a poetaster, you would only insult a poet by refusing to consider what he says, and simply professing a concern for how he says it. Therefore if the poet choose to lay all the blame of the dissolution and failure of Arthur's polity upon the illicit loves of Lancelot and Guinevere, it seems to me that he committed a serious error in his invention of the early circumstances of their meeting; nothing of the kind being discoverable either in Malory, or the old chronicle of Merlin. Great stress, no doubt, is laid by Sir Thomas Malory on this illicit love as the fruitful source of much calamity; but then Malory relates that Arthur had met and loved Guinevere long before he asked for her in marriage; whereas, according to Tennyson, he sent Lancelot to meet the betrothed maiden, and she, never having seen Arthur, loved Lancelot, as Lancelot Guinevere, at first sight. That circumstance, gratuitously invented (or adapted from "Tristram and Iseult"), surely makes the degree of the lovers' guilt a problem somewhat needlessly difficult to determine, if it was intended to brand their guilt as heinous enough to deserve the ruin of a realm, and the failure of Arthur's humane life-purpose. Guinevere, seeing Lancelot before Arthur, and recognizing in him (as the sweet and pure Elaine, remember, did after her), the type of all that is noble and knightly in man, loves the messenger, and continues to love him after she has met her destined husband, whom she judges (and the reader of the *Idyls* can hardly fail to coincide with her judgment) somewhat cold, colourless, and aloof, however impeccable and grave; a kind of moral phantom, or imaginative symbol of the conscience, whom Guinevere, as typifying the human soul, ought indeed

to love best ("not Lancelot, nor another"), but whom, as a particular living man, Arthur, one quite fails to see why Guinevere, a living woman with her own idiosyncrasies, should be bound to love rather than Lancelot. For if Guinevere, as woman, ought to love "the highest" man "when she sees him," it does not appear why that obligation should not equally bind all the women of her Court also! And then what becomes of the monogamic moral? If the whole burden of the catastrophe was to be laid upon the conception of a punishment deserved by the great guilt of particular persons, that guilt ought certainly to have been so described as to appear heinous and inexcusable to all beyond question. The story need not have been thus moralized; but the Poet-Laureate chose to emphasize the breach of a definite moral obligation as unpardonable, and pregnant with evil issues. That being so, I submit that the moral sense is left hesitating and bewildered, rather than satisfied and acquiescent, which interferes with a thorough enjoyment of the work even as art. The sacrament of marriage is high and holy; yet we feel disposed to demand whether here it may not be rather the letter and mere convention than the spirit of constant affection and true marriage that is magnified. And if so, though popularity with the English public may be secured by this vindication of their domestic ideal, higher interests are hardly so well subserved. Doubtless the treachery to husband and friend on the part of the lovers was black and detestable. Doubtless their indulged love was far from innocent. But then why invent so complicated a problem, and yet write as if it were perfectly simple and easy of solution? What I complain of is, that this love has a certain air of grievous fatality and excuse about it, while yet the poet treats it as mere unmitigated guilt, fully justifying all the disaster entailed thereby, not only on the sinners themselves, but on the State, and the cause of human welfare. Nor can we feel quite sure, as the subject

is here envisaged, that, justice apart, it is quite according to probability for the knowledge of this constant illicit affection to engender a universal infidelity of the Round Table Knights to vows which not only their lips, as in the case of Guinevere, but also their hearts have sworn; infidelity to their own true affection, and disloyalty to their own genuine aspiration after the fulfilment of chivalrous duty in championing the oppressed—all because a rich-natured woman like Guinevere proves faithful to her affection for a rich kindred humanity in Lancelot! How this comes about is at any rate not sufficiently explained in the poet's narrative; and if so, he must be held to have failed both as artist and as ethical teacher, which in these Idylls he has certainly aspired to be. Then comes the further question, not altogether an easy one to answer, whether it is really true that even widespread sexual excess inevitably entails deterioration in other respects, a lowered standard of integrity and honour? The chivalry of the Middle Ages was *sans peur*, but seldom *sans reproche*. History, on being interrogated, gives an answer ambiguous as a Greek oracle. Was England, for instance, less great under the Regency, or under Elizabeth, than under Cromwell? But at all events, the old legends make the process of disintegration in Arthur's kingdom much clearer than it is made by Tennyson. In Malory, for instance, Arthur is by no means the sinless being of the Idylls. Rightly or wrongly, he is resolved to punish Guinevere for her infidelity by burning, and Lancelot is equally resolved to rescue her, which accordingly he does from the very stake, carrying her off with him to his castle of Joyous Gard. Then Arthur and Sir Gawain make war upon him; and thus, the great knightly heads of the Round Table at variance, the fellowship is inevitably dissolved, for Modred takes advantage of their dissension to seize upon the throne. But in the old legends, who is Modred? The son of Arthur and his sister. According to them, assuredly

the origin of the doom or curse upon the kingdom is the unwitting incest, yet deliberate adultery of Arthur, or perhaps the still earlier and deeply-dyed sin of his father, Uther. Yet, Mr. Swinburne's contention, that Lord Tennyson should have emphasized the sin of Arthur as responsible for the doom that came upon himself and his kingdom, although plausible, appears to me hardly to meet all the exigencies of the case. Mr. Hutton says in reply that then the supernatural elements of the story could have found no place in the poem; no strange portents could have been described as accompanying the birth and death of Arthur. A Greek tragedian, he adds, would never have dreamt of surrounding Œdipus with such portents. But surely the latter remark demonstrates the unsoundness of the former. Has Mr. Hutton forgotten what is perhaps one of the sublimest scenes in any literature, the supernatural passing of this very deeply-dyed sinner, Œdipus, to his divine repose at Colonos, in the grove of those very ladies of divine vengeance, by whose awful ministry he had been at length assoiled of sin? the mysterious stairs; Antigone and Ismene expectant above; he "shading his eyes before a sight intolerable;" after drinking to the dregs the cup of sin and sorrow, rapt from the world, even he, to be tutelary deity of that land? Neither Elijah, nor Moses was a sinless man; yet Moses, after enduring righteous punishment, was not, for God took him, and angels buried him; it was he who led Israel out of Egypt, and communed with Jehovah on Sinai; while Elijah rose from earth in a chariot of fire; both appearing with Jesus on the Mount of Transfiguration. But I would suggest that the poet might have represented suffering and disappointment, not as penalty apportioned to particular transgressions, rather as integral elements in that mysterious destiny which determines the lot of man in his present condition of defect, moral, physical, and intellectual, involved in his "Hamartia," or failure to realize that fulness of being

which yet ideally belongs to him as divine. Both these ideas—the idea of Doom or destiny, and that of Nemesis, on account of voluntary transgression—are alike present in due equipoise in the great conceptions of Greek drama, as Mr. J. A. Symonds has conclusively proved in his brilliant, philosophic, and poetic work on the Greek poetry, against the more one-sided contention of Schlegel. I feel throughout Shakespeare this same idea of mystic inevitable destiny dominating the lives of men; you may call it, if you please, the will of God. Yet if it dooms us to error, ignorance, and crime, at all events this awful will cannot resemble the wills of good mortal men. Othello expiates his foolish credulity, and jealous readiness to suspect her who had given him no cause to doubt her love. But there was the old fool, Brabantio, and the devil Iago; there were his race, his temperament, his circumstances in general, and the circumstances of the hour,—all these were toils woven about him by Fate. Now, if the idea of Destiny be the more accentuated (and a tragedian surely should make us feel both this, and the free-will of man), then, as it seems to me, in the interests of Art, which loves life and harmony, not pure pain, loss, discord, or negation, there ought to be a purifying or idealizing process manifest in the ordeal to which the victims are subjected, if not for the protagonists, at all events for some of those concerned in the action. We must at least be permitted to behold the spectacle of constancy and fortitude, or devotion, as we do in Desdemona, Cordelia, Antigone, Iphigenia, Romeo and Juliet. But the ethical element of free-will is almost exclusively accentuated by Tennyson; and in such a case we desire to be fully persuaded that the “poetical justice” dealt out by the poet is really and radically justice, not a mere provincial or conventional semblance thereof.

Yet if you confine your attention to the individual Idyls themselves, they are undoubtedly most beautiful

models of sinewy strength, touched to consummate grace. There can be nothing more exquisite than the tender flower-like humanity of dear Elaine, nor more perfect in pathetic dignity than the Idyl of Guinevere. Vivien is very powerful; but, as I said, the courtesan appears to me too coarsely and graphically realized for perfect keeping with the general tone of this faëry epic. The "Holy Grail" is a wonderful creation in the realm of the supernatural; all instinct with high spiritual significance, though much of the invention in this, as in the other Idyls, belongs to Sir Thomas Malory. The adventures of the knights, notably of Galahad, Percivale, and Lancelot, in their quest for the Grail, are splendidly described. What, again, can be nobler than the parting of Arthur and Guinevere at Almesbury, where the King forgives and blesses her, she grovelling repentant before him, the gleaming "dragon of the great Pendragonship" making a vaporous halo in the night, as Arthur leaves her, "moving ghost-like to his doom"? Here the scenic element blends incorporate with the human, but assuredly does not overpower it, as has been pretended. Then how excellent dramatically are the subordinate figures of the little nun at Almesbury, and the rustic old monk, with whom Percivale converses in the Holy Grail; while, if we were to notice such similes (Homeric in their elaboration, though modern in their minute fidelity to nature) as that in Enid, which concerns the man startling the fish in clear water by holding up "a shining hand against the sun," or the happy comparison of standing muscle on an arm to a brook "running too vehemently" over a stone "to break upon it," our task would be interminable. The Arthur Idyls are full too of elevating exemplars for the conduct of life, of such chivalrous traits as courage, generosity, courtesy, forbearance, consecration, devotion of life for loyalty and love, service of the weak and oppressed; abounding also with excellent gnostic sayings inculcating these virtues. What admirable

and delightful ladies are Enid, Elaine, Guinevere! Of the Laureate's longer works, this poem and "In Memoriam" are his greatest, though both of these are composed of many brief song-flights.

It may not be unprofitable to inquire what idea Tennyson probably intended to symbolize by the "Holy Grail," and the quest for it. Is it that of mere supernatural portent? Certainly not. The whole treatment suggests far more. I used to think it signified the mystical blood of Christ, the spirit of self-devotion, or, as Malory defines it, "the secret of Jesus." But it scarcely seems possible that Tennyson means precisely that, for then his ideal man, Arthur, would not discourage the quest. Does it not rather stand for that secret of the higher life as sought in any form of supernatural religion, involving acts of worship or asceticism, and religious contemplation? Yet Arthur deprecates not the religious life as such—rather that life in so far as it is not the auxiliary of human service. It is while pursuing the quest that Percivale (in the "Holy Grail") finds all common life, even the most sacred relations of it, as well as the most ordinary and vulgar, turn to dust when he touches them; and to a religious fanatic that is indeed the issue—this life is less than dust to him; he exists for the future and "supernatural" only; his soul is already in another region than this homely work-a-day world of ours; and because it is another, he is only too ready to think it must be higher. What to him are our politics, our bewilderments, our fair humanities, our art and science, or schemes of social amelioration? Less than nothing. What he has to do is to save first his own soul, and then some few souls of others, if he can. But while, as Arthur himself complained, such a one waits for the beatific vision, or follows "wandering fires" of superstition, how often, for men with strength to right the wronged, will "the chance of noble deeds come and go unchallenged"! Arthur even dares to call the Holy Grail "a

sign to maim this order which I made." "Many of you, yea most, return no more." But, as the Queen laments, "this madness has come on us for our sins." Percivale turns monk, Galahad passes away to the spiritual city, Sir Bors meets Lancelot riding madly all abroad, and shouting, "Stay me not ; I have been the sluggard, and I ride apace, for now there is a lion in the path!" Lancelot rides on the quest in order that, through the vision of the Grail, the sin of which his conscience accuses him may be rooted out of his heart. And so it was partly the sin—the infidelity to their vows—that had crept in amongst the knights, which drove the best of them to expiation, to religious fervours, whereby their sin might be purged, thus completing the disintegration of that holy human brotherhood, which had been welded together by Arthur for activities of righteous and loving endeavour after human welfare. Magnificent is the picture of the terrible, difficult quest of Lancelot, whose ineradicable sin hinders him from full enjoyment of the spiritual vision after which he longs. Nor will Arthur unduly discourage those who have thus in mortal peril half attained. "Blessed are Bors, Lancelot, and Percivale, for these have seen according to their sight." Into his mouth the poet also puts some beautiful lines on prayer. More indeed may be wrought for the world by the silent spiritual life, by the truth-seeking student, by the beauty-loving artist, than is commonly believed. In worshipping the ideal they bless men. Arthur rebukes Gawain for light infidel profanity, born only of blind contented immersion in the slime of sense ; while for the others, there was little indeed of the true religious spirit in their quest. "They followed but the leader's bell, for one hath seen, and all the blind will see." With them it is mere fashion, and hollow-lip service, or superstitious fear ; a very devil-worship indeed, standing to them too often in the place of justice, mercy, and plain human duty. Nay, what terrible crimes have been committed against humanity in

the name of this very religion! Even Percivale only attained to spiritual vision through the vision of Galahad, whose power of strong faith came upon him, for he lacked humility, a heavenly virtue too often lacking in the *unco guid*, as likewise in those raised above their fellows through any uncommon gifts, whether of body or mind. In the old legends, the sin of Lancelot himself is represented as consisting quite as much in personal ambition, over-self-confidence, and pride on the score of his prowess, as in his adultery with the Queen. Yet the "pure religion and undefiled" of Galahad, and St. Agnes had been long since celebrated by our poet in two of his loveliest poems. But these sweet children were not left long to battle for goodness and truth upon the earth; heaven was waiting for them; though, while he remained, Galahad, who saw the vision because he was pure in heart, "rode shattering evil customs everywhere" in the strength of that purity and that vision. Arthur, however, avers he could not himself have joined in the quest, because his mission was to mould and guard his kingdom, although, that done, "let visions come and welcome;" nay, to him the common earth and air are all vision; and yet he knows himself no vision, nor God, nor the Divine Man. To the spiritual, indeed, all is religious, sacred, sacramental, for they look through the appearance to the reality, half hidden and half revealed under it. This avowal reminds me of Wordsworth's grand passage in the "Ode on Immortality" concerning "creatures moving about in worlds not realized." But for men not so far advanced, revelations of the Holy Grail, sacramental observances, and stated acts of worship, are indeed of highest import and utility. Yet good, straightforward, modest Sir Bors, who is not over-anxious about the vision, to him it is for a moment vouchsafed, though Lancelot and Percivale attain to it with difficulty, and selfish, superstitious worldlings, with their worse than profitless head-knowledge, bad hearts, hollow worship of Convention and

the Dead Letter, get no inkling of it at all. This wholesome conviction I trace through many of the Laureate's writings. Stylites is not intended to be a flattering, though it is certainly a veracious portrait of the sanctimonious, self-depreciating, yet self-worshipping ascetic. The same feeling runs through "Queen Mary;" and Harold, the honest warrior of unpretending virtue, is well contrasted with the devout, yet un-English and only half-kingly confessor, upon whose piety Stigand passes no very complimentary remarks. So that the recent play which Lord Queensberry objected to surprises me; for in "Despair" it is theological caricature of the divine character, which is made responsible for the catastrophe, quite as much as Agnosticism, a mere reaction from false belief. Besides, has not Tennyson sung "There lives more faith in honest doubt, believe me, than in half the creeds," and "Power was with him in the night, which makes the darkness and the light, and dwells not in the light alone"?

Turning now to the philosophical and elegiac poetry of Tennyson, one would pronounce the poet to be in the best sense a religious mystic of deep insight, though fully alive to the claims of activity, culture, science, and art. It would not be easy to find more striking philosophical poetry than the lines on "Will," the "Higher Pantheism," "Wages," "Flower in the Crannied Wall," the "Two Voices," and especially "In Memoriam." As to "Wages," it is surely true that Virtue, even if she seek no rest (and that is a hard saying), does seek the "wages of going on and still to be." An able writer in *To-day* objects to this doctrine. And of course an Agnostic may be, often is, a much more human person—larger, kinder, sounder—than a believer. But the truth is, the very feeling that Love and Virtue are noblest and best involves the implicit intuition of their permanence, however the understanding may doubt or deny. Again, I find myself thoroughly at one with the profound teaching of the "Higher Pantheism."

As for "In Memoriam," where is the elegiac poetry equal to it in our language? Gravely the solemn verse confronts problems which, mournful or ghastly, yet with some far-away light in their eyes, look us men of this generation in the face, visiting us with dread misgiving or pathetic hope. From the conference, from the agony, from the battle, Faith emerges, aged, maimed, and scarred, yet triumphing and serene. Like every greater poet, Tennyson wears the prophet's mantle, as he wears the singer's bay. Mourners will ever thank him for such words as, "'Tis better to have loved and lost, than never to have loved at all;" and "Let love clasp grief, lest both be drowned;" and, "Our wills are ours, we know not how; our wills are ours, to make them Thine;" as for the lines that distinguish Wisdom and Knowledge, commending Wisdom as mistress, and Knowledge but as handmaid. Every mourner has his favourite section, or particular chapel of the temple-poem, where he prefers to kneel for worship of the Invisible. Yes, for into the furnace men may be cast bound, and come forth free, having found for companion One whose form was like the Son of God. Our poet's conclusion may be foolish and superstitious, as some would now persuade us; but if he errs, it is in good company, for he errs with him who sang, "In la sua voluntade e nostra pace," and with Him who prayed, "Father, not My will, but Thine."

The range, then, of this poet in all the achievements of his long life is vast—lyrical, dramatic,* narrative, allegoric,

* "The Cup," and "The Falcon" (from Boccaccio—no poet of equal rank was ever more indebted to his predecessors; but *nihil tetigit quod non ornavit*), are, like all his best things, brief: "dramatic fragments," one may even call them. "The Cup" was admirably interpreted, and scenically rendered under the auspices of Mr. Irving and Miss Ellen Terry; but it is itself a precious addition to the stores of English tragedy—all movement and action, intense, heroic, steadily rising to a most impressive climax, that makes a memorable picture on the stage. Camma, though painted only with a few telling strokes, is a splendid heroine of antique virtue, fortitude, and self-devotion. "The Falcon" is a truly graceful and charming acquisition to the repertory of lighter English drama.

philosophical. Even strong and barbed satire is not wanting, as in "Sea-Dreams," the fierce verses to Bulwer, "The Spiteful Letter." Of the most varied measures he is master, as of the richest and most copious vocabulary. Only in the sonnet form, perhaps, does his genius not move with so royal a port, so assured a superiority over all rivals. I have seen sonnets even by other living English writers that appeared to me more striking; notably, fine sonnets by Mr. J. A. Symonds, Mr. Theodore Watts, Mrs. Pfeiffer, Miss Blind. But surely Tennyson must have written very little indifferent poetry when you think of the fuss made by his detractors over the rather poor verses beginning "I stood on a tower in the wet," and the somewhat insignificant series entitled "The Window." For "The Victim" appears to me exceedingly good. Talk of daintiness and prettiness! Yes; but it is the lambent, water-waved damascening on a Saladin's blade; it is the rich enchasement on a Cœur de Lion's armour. That distinguished poet and essayist, the lamented James Thomson, has somewhere said something to this effect: Apollo may be stronger than Hercules, though his white symmetry does not obtrude the strength. Amid the soul-subduing spaces, and tall forested piers of that cathedral by the Rhine, there are long jewelled flames for window, and embalmed kings lie shrined in gold, with gems all over it like eyes. While Tennyson must loyally be recognized as the Arthur or Lancelot of modern English verse, even by those among us who believe that their own work in poetry cannot fairly be damned as "minor," while he need fear the enthronement of no younger rival near him, the poetic standard he has established is in all respects so high that poets who love their art must needs glory in such a leader and such an example, though pretenders may verily be shamed into silence, and Marsyas cease henceforward to contend with Apollo.

ROBERT BROWNING.

IT is not wonderful in an age of obtrusive artifice in art, and sham sentiment like the present, that Mr. Browning should have written long with little appreciation; it is rather wonderful that the public appreciation of so intensely sincere a poet as he is should be now steadily growing.

Our necessarily brief study of Browning may appropriately be prefaced by some recent words of Matthew Arnold, where he tells us to conceive of poetry more worthily than it has hitherto been the custom to conceive it. "More and more," he says, "mankind will discover that we have to turn to poetry to interpret life for us, to console and sustain us. Science will appear incomplete without it, for well does Wordsworth call poetry the impassioned expression which is in the countenance of all science, the breath and finer spirit of all knowledge." But Aristotle had long since observed that the superiority of poetry over history consists in its possessing a higher truth and a higher seriousness. How opposed this view is to current and fashionable theories need not be pointed out. An elegant amusement for the leisure of a cultured class, a dainty trifle, the taste for which is mostly outgrown with youth, that is what some reckon it. Critics inculcate that the form is all, and the substance nothing. This theory is assuredly fathered by men themselves impotent in respect of thought, in the interest of a metre-mongering school equally sterile. It is a theory misbegotten by critical wind upon mere

versified vacuity.* And accordingly we have incontinent garrulity, grotesquely complicated by a kind of literary aphasia, or ingenuities of verse-mongery innocent of all significance, elaborate metrical manufactures, destitute of inspiration, the sense sliding from one empty verbal abstraction to another, as on thin, tinkling ice, often melodious indeed, but affording no foothold or grasp upon definite thought, or distinct image, or sincere human feeling. This may be a harmless amusement for idle persons, but hardly worthy the attention of strenuous men in so serious a life as human life is bound for most of us to be. At the very antipodes of all this stands Browning. Moreover, what we look for in good poetry, likely to endure beyond the hour's passing fashion, is originality, a term much abused, but rightly implying a distinctive personality, a man thinking, seeing, and feeling, in his own way behind the words; whereas there is a great deal of cultivated verse, which is merely a fair echo of other men's voices. Now, in Browning, we have most marked originality—marked, I will say, to the verge of mannerism.

From careful renewed study I derive the impression, not so much of a lyrist or singer (though he is this sometimes), as of a seer of vital truth in the concrete forms of human life, an interpreter of it, with eminent capacity also for presenting it dramatically. I have never fully felt the happiness of Mr. Arnold's definition of poetry as a *criticism of life*, for after all is said, poetry and criticism as a rule are precisely opposed. It is less the function of poetry to analyse and discriminate than to synthesize and create; yet this phrase does happily describe a good deal of Mr. Browning's work. He delights in subtle psychological analysis of motive. And in his best poems, he usually tells

* I need hardly say that nothing of all this could possibly apply to the limpid and graceful society verse of a writer like Austin Dobson. His skilfully-adapted French measures are particularly germane to those airy and charming fancies, so like beautiful butterflies. Some of Andrew Lang's Ballades, too, are similarly happy.

the story, or presents his dramatic situations, palpably to enforce some idea with which they are pregnant.

There is a school with considerable influence just now, called the "Art-for-Art" school—and its votaries tell us that the moral is nothing in art. Certainly Mr. Browning differs from them; the moral is a great deal to him. But then there are morals and morals. The significance of life is more to him than it is to good people who write tracts. Human life is an infinitely complex Divine mystery, rich, ineffable, to be prisoned in no philosophical formulæ, or code of moral rules. One is a little shy, therefore, of the excellent lessons appreciative disciples will find us in a favourite author: one is apt to suspect the clever conjuror of himself putting in what he so ingeniously drags out. True works of art, like works of Nature, are so incommensurable. *So many* lessons lie dormant there, which the very genius who created them did not even himself suspect—or at least beheld but dimly—and we rather resent being pinned down to *one* lesson, as it may chance to strike the amiable and ingenious disciple. Still, of course, the meaning deduced will be valuable according to the folly or wisdom of the critic. Yet, when we are told by the more airy and academic of our instructors that true art only blossoms for the beauty and pleasantness of blooming, we hesitate a little. There is beauty and beauty, pleasure and pleasure. What if the *highest kind* of beauty and pleasure involve ugliness and pain—aye, moral approval and disapproval—this hateful element of *profit*, as well as that more favourite one of *amusement*? The great dramatic poet, while he unravels before us the tangled skein of life's so intricate mystery, in the very act of creating, also illuminates, with his own profound spiritual insight, the heights and depths of life, with significance we could never have discovered for ourselves. And how are you to obtain that highest kosmic unity which tragic art demands, without such intuition of central universal truth underlying the

common facts of life as they appear to ordinary eyes? Historic chronicles, realistic tales, but no tragic poetry without this. Every great work of Æschylus, Sophocles, and Shakespeare, is thus universal in significance, representative of some grand law of human destiny, some abiding relations of humanity with God. The heroic personages of the Oresteia, Prometheus, Hamlet, Romeo, Juliet, Faust, are not our neighbours over the way, but in their breathing individuality are eternal ideals also. In proportion therefore to a man's own spiritual and intellectual calibre, I do not say for practical, but for prophetic and imaginative purposes—and this apart from the question of inspiration—will be the degree of abiding value in the poetry he creates. So that for critics to commend us to poets without moral sense is more ridiculous than for them to commend us to painters afflicted with colour-blindness, or musicians without ear. If a man is to represent more than the mere surface of life, he must see it truly, or else distort it—must discriminate light from shadow, spiritual beauty from deformity, variety of moral as well as mental shape, and tone, and tint, all the soul-notes that contrasted and combined make human music, the inevitable consequences that Nature has assigned to moral good and evil. Else you will have reiterated photographs of low passions and mean motives, which, except as a foil to the higher aspects of life, and either as assisting to develop, or, at least, as antagonistic to the nobler elements of our nature, palpably corrupting and disintegrating, can only be repulsive to sane people, and therefore bad as art. Would you call a man a great painter if he (though never so skilfully) could paint you *only* varieties of leprosy and skin disease? Besides, without a clear vision of what conscience reveals, of its compensations and reproaches, of the dreadful desolating dragon-brood engendered by sin and sin's congeners, no tragedy, no true moving picture of life is possible. Now, Browning presents you with thoroughly sound and whole-

some views of life—even if at times he stirs up the rottenness of it a little too curiously. But he does not persistently *obtrude* disease upon you. If you have Guido, in the “Ring and the Book,” you have also the holy child Pompilia, and Caponsacchi, the frivolous but generous soul, capable of regeneration through the combined effect of Pompilia’s virtues, wrongs, and the diabolical depths to which selfishness has descended in Guido, her husband. The poet’s outlook upon life is large and liberal, but deep also and sane, so that we are braced by his revelations of what he sees, better able to live and enjoy our own life, bear our own sorrows and disappointments, die our own death “in sure and certain hope.” And although I cannot agree with the ultra-Browningites that the defectiveness and obscurity of his style is a positive merit—because, forsooth, a treasure is valuable in proportion to the trouble it costs to find—yet I do think the rough shell is well worth breaking open, if there be so true a pearl as there is in this case within.

“Grand rough old Martin Luther
Bloomed fables, flowers on furze,”

as our poet says.

Though he has written little pure drama, yet, on the whole, he is the most eminent *dramatic* poet of modern England; while as lyricist, as singer, he cannot compete with Tennyson, whose form is as felicitous as his subject-matter is richly sensuous, intellectual, and spiritual. But I do not think any post-Elizabethan dramas of our literature have surpassed, and only one or two have rivalled, the “Blot in the ‘Scutcheon,’” and “Colombe’s Birthday.” These are full of movement, of action, of various passion; they pulsate with life and emotion; the plot is noble and elevated; they abound in characters delineated by a master’s hand; while “Colombe’s Birthday” is not directly, but indirectly stimulating, and humanizing in the highest degree. Pompilia, indeed, in the “Ring and the Book,” who, at the beginning, comes very near Goethe’s Margaret for gracious maiden-

hood, grows too intellectual and Browningsque towards the end. It is far otherwise with *Colombe*, who, budding a pure, high-born maiden in the opening scenes, rejoicing in her own fair world and little regarding others, blossoms amid the storms of adversity, under the lovelight of a lover of noble nature, though of low birth, into the highest type of womanhood, renouncing the grandest prizes of the world, and devoting herself, through the consecrating influence of this one love, to alleviation and amelioration of the lot of those in need. I know not any drama showing more delicate insight into the shy maturing of a woman's affection, checked and chilled by the cold breath of convention, yet ripened by the vision of a heroic soul's devotion, ever itself deepening and broadening in purity and self-renouncement through his love for her. These plays abound in beautiful poetry, appropriate to the place in which it occurs, while indiscriminately euphuistic diction in season and out is entirely, and most righteously, abjured by Browning. But assuredly this utterly dramatic Shakespearian manner of unrolling the royal robe of human life before us seamless and unrent is not that ordinarily congenial to him. Usually the inventor prefers to pull his mechanism to pieces, and show us how it works; the gardener plucks up his growing flower to display the roots and manner of organization. There is probably implied here less sure vision into the objective manifestations of character, into how it must inevitably unfold itself in collision with its fellows. Thus Browning does not always afford us clearly constructed plots; his narratives do not develop themselves smoothly; he is not interested in the progress of the events themselves. The enormously voluminous "*Ring and the Book*" shows wonderfully acute and varied knowledge of life; but it is revealed through monologues, wherein many persons comment from their special point of view on a few incidents only. His play of "*Strafford*" deals with a grand national theme; and in *Pym* we have the strongly delineated figure

of one of our great national heroes admirably contrasted with poor Strafford, and the weak, unreliable King Charles ; but the plot seems rather confused, and the movement of the whole action somewhat indistinct. It contains, however, a noble passage of poetry at the close, wherein the poet, while impartially just to Strafford, *seems* to show, in the final utterance of Pym, that his own sympathy is with England in her liberal career of progress.

But, on the other hand, the delineation of a popular agitator in "A Soul's Tragedy" is almost cynical, and not very happy, while "Hohenstiel Schwangau" seems a quite unveraciously lenient, as well as rather unpoetical portrait of the man, whom the greatest European poet of our generation, Victor Hugo, chastised with scorpions in his "Chatiments," and the "Histoire d'un Crime." The "Patriot," however, is an excellent satire on the fickleness of mobs.

"Pippa Passes," again, is but a series of dramatic scenes, linked together as by God's own sunshine, sweet child-Pippa, the innocent bird-song of whose young heart falls, without her knowledge, though with momentous effect, upon some ears of guilty, worldly souls who hear. The episode of Ottima and Sebald with their adulterous loves, after the murder by Ottima of her old husband, is one of the most tremendous things in English drama, as, in a livid flash of lightning, the whole ghastly scene starts out upon you ; you hear the blood-stained couple talk, and see them move. It is of Shakespearian power.

Now, there are distinctly two schools of epic and dramatic art—one synthetic, objective, the other analytic, reflective, didactic. Certainly the former is the more perfectly dramatic ; but great poets have always blended the two manners, though belonging distinctively to one or other school. The way of Æschylus and Sophocles is not that of Homer, Chaucer, Shakespeare, Scott, Thackeray, Balzac, Byron ; but more akin to that of the greatest modern artists in general, Victor Hugo, Shelley, Wordsworth,

George Sand, Browning, Wagner, Goethe. But, of course, that is not to say that an artist never writes in the manner less characteristic of him. For good or evil, the age has grown self-conscious, analytic, metaphysical, scientific. And the most important artists will assuredly reflect this temper of their age. Does it not seem silly, as well as unthankful, to resent this? to condemn such work because it is unlike the old? It is a product *sui generis*; it is so much added to the old work, for which let us be thankful. Browning peers microscopically into far-away influencing causes, and remote, intricately-mingled motives; these interest him almost more than the conduct to which they lead. And why not? But the work is proportionately less dramatic. For character is here presented in its more isolated and passive aspects. In this kind of work it is nearly impossible that the analyst should not colour the representation very manifestly from looking through his own special glasses; his lens will not be quite achromatic. In dramatic poetry proper the creator is a centre, radiating alien individuality, rather than diffusing his own peculiar subjective idiosyncrasy among the works of his hand. His characters possess him, rather than he them. Curiously enough, in the volume called "Pachiarotto," Mr. Browning seems to disclaim all self-revelation. Now, if this be a merit, is it true of him; and if it be true of him, is it a merit? To both questions I answer, *No*. You don't want a mere impassive mirror, reflecting surfaces, but a man, selecting vital characteristics. Even Shakespeare reveals himself in the *manner* of his representation of life; all genius must. Far more is this true of Browning, even if he had not written many poems obviously self-revealing. But every dramatist is self-revealing by the emphasis and tone of his delineations; while Browning comments like a chorus upon the action, both personally, and through one pretty obviously his mouthpiece; only he is so many-sided that he can throw himself into many

attitudes of mind as regards the same action, or circumstance.

The old truths remain, but their body and appearance change. They return, indeed, enriched with the result of their own denial, with the doubt thrown upon them, which has caused them to be remoulded, and recast more perfectly. And so when science cried, "Overturn! overturn!" and the old creeds suffered obscurity, arose prophets and poets of denial and despair, with their divinely appointed work to do. For who can give us a complete philosophy of life? We must gather together the special vital aspects of the whole, each artist was gifted to see. Shelley, Byron, Carlyle, Leopardi passed; we have Victor Hugo, Tennyson, Browning, Hegel, Fichte, Coleridge, Wordsworth, James Hinton. Is this a strange doctrine, that great poets *think*? Did not Dante, Milton, Lucretius? They do think, but with all their faculties fused into one organ, instead of with a wrongfully isolated, and, therefore crippled function, the logical understanding only. Milton and Dante have powerfully helped to mould theology; and in this spiritual crisis, produced mainly by scientific discovery, men will look more and more, I think, to poets who are prophets also. And so I shall presently inquire briefly what salient lessons Browning has taught us.

But we have first to note his peculiar skill in psychological analysis, and especially in a region which he has made quite his own, wherein he has enriched our literature with such subtle studies as no other writer has given us—the twilight land of moral sophistry, where it is hard indeed to discriminate between true and false, religious and worldly, vulgar and ideal, good and evil or mean motives, where they are ever passing into one another, the Protean soul ever eluding her own self-knowledge, and the knowledge of others, by assuming infinite masks and shapes. Nor is this region so unfamiliar to the accustomed inward life of most of us, after all; for how mixed are motives even in our

very religion, and the most ostensibly distinterested actions of life! To this class of work belong "Paracelsus," "Sludge," "Blougram"—and wonderfully clever studies they are, especially the two last; though these are hardly poetry, while "Paracelsus" is. The pictures of casuistically and scholastically trained Roman Catholic ecclesiastics; shrewd, ambitious, worldly, like Ogniben in the "Soul's Tragedy;" sensual and superstitious, as Fra Lippo Lippi, the monk of the Spanish cloister, and the old dying bishop, who orders his tomb at St. Praxed's church; or semi-sceptical, outwardly conforming men of the world, like Blougram; these are quite unique and inimitable. Browning seems positively to revel, as though for the mere mental gladiatorship, suppleness of soul's wrist, swift dazing play of intellectual fence, in these labyrinthine convolutions of juggling sophistry, wherein some unseen adversary is confounded by sheer devilry of the understanding, and the worse often made to appear the better reason. He is many-sided in sympathy, sees all round and far away, and, therefore, perhaps, is unable to take one side very pronouncedly. He even sees what may be said for an error, a bad cause, or a bad man, their redeeming or modifying qualities, and what a bad man has to say for himself. So far he becomes his *apologist*, finds a soul of good in things evil. That is notably so in the "Ring and the Book," in "Sludge," and "Blougram." Guido and Blougram are in perfect dramatic keeping; all they say is a perfectly natural self-revelation of their native unloveliness; it must be confessed that the studies are somewhat unsavoury from their merciless realism, where not a wart or a wen is left out.

Another of these persons, but a secular person in this case, is the elder man, the lord in the "Inn Album"—a powerful narrative—for the two other people, the upright and just, though somewhat stern, soured, and merciless woman, and the young millionaire whom she saves, are absolutely veracious portraits; but the tempter has no

redeeming quality whatever, he is a moral monster ; and do we want Iago so minutely vivisected over and over again ?

But Sludge is, though very clever, I think, one of Browning's less perfectly dramatic studies. His favourite method is to make these people analyze themselves in their own fashion, in a monologue addressed to some imaginary interlocutor. But in a sketch like Sludge, you too much see Browning looking into his subject, and giving his own version of what he sees, though ostensibly in the voice of the self-apologist. He is talking inside a lay figure. The author's acute glance discerns all the influences that would mould, mar, and corrupt such a man as he takes Sludge to be, and makes him comment on these ; though to him probably the process of his own degeneration would not have been at all such as he could be so fully aware of, and be able to trace thus distinctly with his finger. Moreover, he displays a wealth of far-reaching speculation, and opulence of intellectual resource, a fertility and cleverness in special pleading, which we can scarcely attribute to the poor creature, whom here and there the author lets us see he intends to represent. Assuredly long monologues, laying bare the interminable inner processes of one over-intellectualized, and self-conscious mind, are apt to be wearisome. Besides which, the writer's very marked and mannered idiosyncrasy of expression is usually lent to his different characters. And you feel at times as if they were too much made mouthpieces for the abstruse, though interesting, reflections which the writer desires to utter on various topics.

Though I yield to no one in very warm admiration for a great deal of Browning's work, especially the earlier work, yet I confess I do feel that *verse* is not always the fitting and inevitable medium for many of these utterances. And I judge by the canon he himself has furnished in the verses he entitles "Transcendentalism,"—where he tells a brother in the craft not to take a harp into his hands, and after

much preluding "speak bare words across the chords," however excellent, but to drape his ideas in sights and sounds. There is too much mere arguing, not enough appeal to the intuitions, emotions, perceptions, imagination. And the style accordingly wants proportionate poetic distinction, wants dignity; but if sound substance be necessary to the best poetry, a noble form is equally required. Browning's is not a *winning* style—the mere witchery of words is too often absent—we are under no spell of enchantment. His lines are not "in love with the progress of their own beauty;" it is rather our bare intellect that is strained to understand the literary conundrums proposed to us. Perfect poetry involves the perfect harmony of word, meaning, mood, and sound, with dignity or loveliness either of subject, or interpretation; though an obtrusively artificial is to a noble style as the deportment of a dancing master to the unaffected demeanour of a gentleman. But we want the volatile thought, or feeling preserved for us in the crystal of pellucid expression, made a world-heritage in the amber of a happy phrase. That is eminently the characteristic of Shakespeare, Dante, Milton, and also of Tennyson—occasionally too of lesser lights, like Gray Campbell, and George Herbert.

Of course, fine philosophical poetry,* which is the imaginative expression of profound thought in symbol and metaphor, or phrase of high degree, demands corresponding attention and capacity on the part of the reader; and good poetry in general, indeed, demands this. But *unnecessary* intellectual strain the reader usually loves to be spared in poetry by a careful and captivating manner on the part of the poet—in the best poetry the very images and phrases

* There is little of this in Browning. We find, indeed, much nakedly argumentative, ratiocinative verse, but that is not, strictly speaking, poetry at all. Parts of Tennyson's "In Memoriam," of Mr. Buchanan's "Balder," of Mr. Swinburne's "Songs Before Sunrise," are better examples of a type very rare in English poetry. There is little of it in Coleridge, and Wordsworth, but somewhat more in Shelley.

lead him captive as with a chain of flowers, with "strains of linkèd sweetness long drawn out," by the mere instinctive selection of harmonious ideas, images, and words, whose very sound, and subtle associations prolong and rivet the charm. While in Browning, not only is the grammatical construction difficult—from long parentheses, and side eddies of comment on subjects not in close relationship with the main theme, inversions of the parts of speech, and strange elisions—but the metre appears seldom as an outgrowth from the sense, rather as an extraneous piece of adopted ingenuity, the grotesque cleverness of which, indeed, is more diverting and confusing than helpful—the words themselves seem chosen for their direct meaning *only*, irrespective of beautiful appropriateness; their intrinsic ugliness, harshness, and disagreeableness of image, or suggestion, being altogether disregarded.*

Browning, moreover—who often reminds me, both in his admirable qualities and in his defects, of Ben Jonson—is an exceedingly learned man, familiar with all manner of technical terms belonging to the various arts, sciences, even the trades and professions of daily life—a most remarkable combination of speculative poet, and shrewd experienced man of the world, familiar with it in all its aspects, whether elevated or vulgar. Now these learned details he is apt somewhat mercilessly to obtrude on the reader, taking for granted a familiarity with them which is uncommon. But if in poetry we are pulled up short by many terms unfamiliar, the effect is disturbing to that continuity of mood or sentiment which the enjoyment of poetry demands; and there are so many blanks and barren spaces left in our imagination; it is in that respect just like musical verse with a minimum of meaning, which we strive uncomfortably and in vain to arrive at. But here, though we have a thoughtful poet, we have not one who always

* I cannot comment on *Sordello*, for I have never been able to master the construction.

helps us by sweet cadences. In "Christmas Eve and Easter Day," he gives us a half-humorous account of how some of his metres occur to him, and this passage furnishes a fair specimen of such metres:—

" A tune was born in my head last week
 Out of the thump-thump and shriek-shriek
 Of the train, as I came by it up from Manchester,
 And when next week I take it back again,
 My head will sing to the engine's clack again,
 While it only makes my neighbour's haunches stir,
 Finding no dormant musical sprout
 In him, as in me, to be jolted out."

Great dramatic poets have always much humour, and this is a marked feature in Browning. I cannot but think that the bizarre surprises of his rhythm are often contrived out of sheer fun, with a sort of Rabelaisian or Aristophanic chuckle over the discomfiture they must cause to delicately constituted ears. For assuredly, the ingenuity of the rhymes is infinite. Not in "Hudibras," "Beppo," or "Don Juan" is it more fertile. And this is often perfectly appropriate to the subject-matter, and so agreeable—as in "Fra Lippo Lippi," for instance, that thoroughly dramatic, most breathing portrait. Even in "Christmas Eve" the humour of some of the pictures is equal to Dickens. And what can exceed the tragi-comedy humour of the "Bishop Orders his Tomb," the "Spanish Cloister," and "Holy Cross Day"?

These pieces are as sharply outlined and veracious as possible. In "The Monk's Soliloquy in the Spanish Cloister," you have a malicious, bad, but grossly superstitious and self-righteous monk, apparently looking out from his cell window at another, who is attending to his favourite flowers in the monastery garden, a placid, innocent sort of person, but not so scrupulous in his religious observances. The wicked old bigot detests the blameless insipidity of his neighbour. Though full of grim fun, the picture is terrible too. This is what a bigot can be.

But there is no such extravagant, and out-of-the-way

word in the language that Browning will not find you a rhyme for, if not with one word, then with two, three, or even four, and if not in one language, then in another. Of these treble and quadruple rhymes he is fond. One or two strange freaks in this direction I will quote from "Old Pictures in Florence :"—

" I that have haunted the dim San Spirito—
Or was it rather the Ognissanti ?
Patient on altar steps planting a weary toe ;
Nay, I shall have it yet, detur amanti !
My Koh-i-noor, or if that's a platitude,
Jewel of Giamschid, the Persian Sofi's eye !
So in anticipative gratitude,
What if I take up my hope and prophesy ? "

Then in the same page we have *bag'em hot* rhyming to *Witanagemot*, the Latin word *Ante* to *Dante*, *perorate* to *zero rate*, *cub licks* to *republics*. And "Master Hughes of Saxe Gotha" is a still more extraordinary instance of wanton barbarisms in rhyming. Here we have *vociferance* and *stiffer hence*, and *corrosive* and *o sieve!* But even in his treatment of a grave tragic subject it is characteristic of our author to show a certain quaint humour, and the phrases used are frequently rude and colloquial. This, indeed, bestows a *cachet* of individuality. And though not infrequently such a method gives a somewhat grotesque and inharmonious effect to Browning's serious poetry, yet how far better is it than the finical lackadaisical unreality, as of Osric, or Piercie Shafton, so in vogue now, that fears to call a spade a spade, and faints and screams with the delicate titillating delight of calling it an effodiator, or something equally silly!

The obscurity complained of comes sometimes from the monologue method, for the one person who is alone before the reader is talking at, questioning, and replying to other interlocutors, whom the author has in his mind, but the reader only guesses at; and what they are supposed to say the reader must divine from the only words he has before him.

Enough of all this, however. It needs pointing out, if you wish to do as Matthew Arnold bids you, estimate your classic fairly, and recognize where he comes short, only in order that you may the more fully and intelligently appreciate what is truly admirable in him and others. For, let me say distinctly, with whatever abatements, Browning is a great English writer, to whom we are very deeply indebted. A fissured volcano rolls you out ashes, stones, and smoke, along with its flame and burning lava. And he who never descends into the deeps shall never ascend upon the heights. A dapper dandy, with little mind and little heart, but perfect self-possession—there is not very much of him to possess—hands you his neat little gift well polished, say, a new silk hat nicely brushed. An uncouth great man, with big mind and big heart, possesses himself not so thoroughly—there is more of him to possess—and he presents you with *his* gift; say, a huge vase of gems; but the vase may have a flaw in it, and what then? One can only pity the fastidious person with the weak digestion, whose gorge so rises at some trivial fault, as he deems it, in the cookery that he cannot enjoy, and be nourished by good wholesome food, when it is offered. Perhaps because it lacks olives or truffles, he is for throwing it all away. And as Mr. Browning's style is sometimes perfectly clear, full of Saxon force and dignity, his lines and phrases here and there memorable for their strong incisive felicity, seldomer, though now and then, even for delicate grace, so his metres are frequently original, appropriate, vigorous, and perfectly germane to the sense. That is so in the fine stirring ballads of "Hervé Riel," "Gismond," the "Ride from Ghent to Aix," and in the whole of that spirited tale, the "Flight of the Duchess." This is told by an old huntsman retainer who had assisted the Duchess in her flight; and the easy jovial familiar canter of it is inimitably adapted to the speaker, and to his charming story. The "Pied Piper of Hamelin," again, the child's

story, for its light humour, and flexible dancing measure corresponding, could not be surpassed. In "Cavalier Tunes" you hear the gallop of cavalry, and the clank of the sabre. What can be finer in sound than the "Lost Leader," so elevated and human in sentiment also? What more exhilarating and interpretative of the sense than the rapid rush of the well-known "How they brought the Good News from Ghent to Aix?"

But "Saul" is probably the finest poem Browning ever wrote, and it has the note of immortality. I know not any modern poem more glorious for substance and form both; here they interpenetrate; they are one as soul and body, character and deed, lofty aim and heroic countenance. The glory of the lilt of it, the long billowy roll of the cadence, entirely corresponds to the splendour of clear imagination that burns in upon the soul, as with sunlight, the whole beautiful succession of scenes, all harmonious with unity of purpose and highly human aim, rising luminous before us to the sweet song of David the Shepherd Boy, while he sings, and singing wrestles with the Kingdom of Darkness, that holds captive Saul's kingly spirit, beloved by him, until his deep, loving insight culminates in one sublime vision of Divine Love, whence his own, and all the universe have proceeded; Divine Love condescending to human weakness and death for our deliverance, ever giving itself, indeed, but most fully in young David's descendant, Jesus the Christ, the Redeemer, the elder brother of mankind.

I have said that we must certainly regard Browning as *teacher*; and so let us briefly note, in conclusion, a few of the salient impressions as to his message, conveyed by a general study of his works. And yet he is hardly a prophet—because he throws himself with so much appreciative sympathy into all the possible opposed aspects of life, and attitudes of the human actors. I think it is Mr. Hutton who has well called him a great imaginative interpreter of the *approaches* to action. Moreover, he is

rather an acute psychologist than a profound metaphysician. His own convinced contribution to the solution of the world-problem is less remarkable than his keen, intelligent appreciation of what others, often mutually antagonistic, have contributed. We have inevitably touched on one at least of the lessons to be learned from him in describing "Saul." He seems to believe in Divine Love, and human Love, as the best and most substantial realities. He sings :—

"If any two creatures grew into one,
They would do more than the world has done ;
Though each apart were never so weak,
Yet vainly through the world should ye seek
For the knowledge and the might
Which in such union grew their right."

Some of his lines and phrases are miracles of condensation. Thus out of the passionate fragment, "In a Balcony," I take—

"Look on through years ! we cannot kiss a second day like this,
Else were this earth no earth."

Usually he deals with *Scenery* as did the elder poets and Scott ; it is only a background to him for his figures. But he often paints with graphic force, especially his favourite Italian scenes. How vivid the lunar rainbow and fiery sky in "Christmas Eve," and the charming Venetian poem, so full of rich, ripe passion, and love-languor, "In a Gondola." Similarly beautiful is the episode of Jules and Phene ; and there is quite a Keatsian lusciousness of sensuous enjoyment in the "Bishop Orders his Tomb."

Nature, however, is not to Browning a grand spiritual symbol, moving to meditative rapture, as she moves Wordsworth, Shelley, Byron, Coleridge. He never gives himself up to her, but asserts himself against her inquisitorially, as it were. Yet the vital function of Nature in her secret, unconfessed influence over human emotion, even when ostensibly concerned only with other human beings, is dealt with strikingly here and there, notably in these fine lines

from "By the Fireside," where apparently, as in "One Word More," Mr. Browning's wife, our greatest English poetess, is referred to—the poet is speaking of the supreme moment, as he always describes it, of love given and returned. There cannot be lovelier lines :—

“ We two stood there with never a third,
 But each by each, as each knew well ;
 The sights we saw and the sounds we heard,
 The lights and the shades made up a spell,
 Till the trouble grew and stirred.
 Oh the little more, and how much it is !
 And the little less, and what worlds away !
 How a sound shall quicken content to bliss,
 Or a breath suspend the blood's best play,
 And life be a proof of this !
 A moment after, and hands unseen
 Were hanging the night around us fast,
 But we knew that a bar was broken between
 Life and life ; we were mixed at last,
 In spite of the mortal screen.
 The forests had done it, there they stood ;
 We caught for a second the powers at play ;
 They had mingled us so for once and for good,
 Their work was done, we might go or stay ;
 They relapsed to their ancient mood.”

There is a similar thought in "Le Byron de nos jours." But God the Creator, and the human individual with his free will, stand face to face, if I rightly apprehend his teaching on this score ; and external Nature (except as educating man) is of comparatively little importance : he is furious, indeed, with Byron (whom he detests) for teaching differently. Browning is no Pantheist, and no mystic. Personally, I regret it, so far as he is to be regarded as teacher.

I note that in the "Return of the Druses," "Paracelsus," "Sludge," "Blougram," he deals with the same favourite topic, a man pretending to supernatural power, partly for ambitious ends, but partly also for the sake of what he honestly believes to be the good of mankind, to engender a salutary confidence in them, to give them strength and

comfort. But there is always a conflict within the man as to whether this is really justifiable or not. The insincerity will not let conscience rest. This is the point of view of *pious fraud*; but in neither case is there more than the merest passing shadow of a conviction of the genuineness of the miraculous claim preferred. Now I cannot help thinking that the subject becomes *pro tanto* less intrinsically poetical, as well as probably less true to fact. Most likely Browning does not conceive of such men as believing in their own abnormal magical faculty (except, indeed, slightly by an almost avowed process of self-sophistication), because he is so far at one with the scientific scepticism of his age as not himself to admit the possibility of any such pretensions being in any measure well founded. Now, some of us have learned to regard this question with very differently instructed eyes, the result being that our conclusions are different also. But yet the mystical, supernatural element does colour some of his most notable poems—namely, those which deal with Christianity.

It is sufficiently remarkable in this age of scepticism, that our two indisputably most eminent poets, and precisely those most eminent for intellectual power, should be on the side of *faith*, and moreover of Christian faith, though claiming liberty to interpret the articles of that faith for themselves. One of Browning's most characteristic and arresting poems is the "Experience of Karshish, an Arab Physician." He, visiting Bethany in the course of his travels, encounters there Lazarus, and writes concerning him to a friend and fellow-physician far away. In this wonderfully graphic letter he is palpably dominated by some strange impression as of a *real experience* in the case, though he is bound professionally to regard and write of it contemptuously, as one of mere trance and "hallucination." Indeed, he is angry with himself and surprised because he *cannot* treat the matter as lightly as his understanding assures him it ought to be treated. So that, amid his

description of new remedies, gum-tragacanth, mottled spiders, the Aleppo sort of blue-flowering borage, and what not, he returns, though apologetically, to this singular condition of Lazarus, whom he describes as living in the light of another world, a stranger here, at cross-purposes with all men's ordinary views of life, with firm adoring trust in the benevolent Nazarene physician, who, as he thinks, raised him from the dead, and on whose claim to be Divine he implicitly relies. Karshish writes :—

“ I crossed a ridge of short sharp broken hills,
Like an old lion's cheek-teeth : out there came
A moon made like a face, with certain spots
Multiform, manifold, and menacing ;
Then a wind rose behind me ; so we met
In this old sleepy town at unawares,
The man and I.”

What a picture ! why is it not painted by a kindred genius ? Again :—

“ He holds on firmly to some thread of life
(It is the life to lead perforce)
Which runs across some vast distracting orb
Of glory on either side that meagre thread,
Which, conscious of, he must not enter yet,
The spiritual life around the earthly life !
So is the man perplexed with impulses,
Sudden to start off crosswise, not straight on,
Proclaiming what is right and wrong across,
And not along this black thread thro' the blaze,
It should be baulked by here it cannot be.”

Then he apologizes for devoting so much valuable space to a madman, and resumes professional talk. But in a postscript he can't help adding :—

“ The very God ! think Abib ! dost thou think ?
So the All-great were the all-loving too—
So through the thunder comes a human voice,
Saying, O heart I made, a heart beats here !
Face my hands fashioned, see it in myself !
Thou hast no *power*, nor may'st conceive of mine,
But *love* I gave thee, with myself to love ;
And thou must love me who have died for thee.
. . . . The madman saith he said so : it is strange.”

Now, a man could scarcely have written this marvellous poem, every word of which will repay study, had he not himself believed in the story of Lazarus, and in the so-called supernatural elements which it implies: this gives the astonishing force and reality to it; else the poet would hardly represent the ideas involved as so dominating the learned stranger.

“Caliban upon Setebos” is also remarkably powerful—it is, in vividly realized grotesque imaginative symbol, a terrible satire upon the low anthropomorphic notions men have made to themselves concerning God, and which have become formulated in some current popular theologies. Not from the best and deepest, but from the more degraded and superficial character of human nature, have our religious ideas been too much derived. So that Browning, though a Christian, might not be considered by all strictly orthodox. Caliban, Shakespeare’s monster, kicks his feet in the slush of the isle, where Prospero and Miranda keep him for a drudge, and soliloquizes about his deity, Setebos, at whose arbitrary tyrannic power he gibes and jeers—until a storm bursts, and then he cowers, abjectly worshipping. This is a strong, weird poem—not liable to the objection that there is too much naked argument, which is true of “Christmas Eve,” and especially of “St. John in the Desert.”

“Christmas Eve and Easter Day” is an elaborate argument, set in imaginative framework, to prove the fundamental postulate of Christianity, and so is “St. John in the Desert.” The argument of “Christmas Eve” is that, if man had *invented* the idea of God suffering with us and for us to redeem us, *he* would be more loving, and therefore really higher than God. And in “Easter Day” the sole punishment of the lost soul allotted by the Judge is, that, since he has chosen for his portion, and has been fully satisfied with the fair prizes this world can offer to his senses and his ambition, he shall keep them for ever, and attain to no more, excluded by the very nature of the case from those

yet diviner possibilities, the more spiritual and less earth-bound aspired to reach. And here we touch upon the idea which recurs with reiterated emphasis in Browning—that earth's perfect is not the absolute perfect—that what *we* count full-orbed and consummate success is not so from a higher point of view, but that rather the apparent failures are the more full of promise and potency; they point to a yet richer completeness to be attained hereafter; they are germs still to be developed; the more slowly they ripen, the more sweet and enduring the fruit. In "Saul" Mr. Browning says:—

" 'Tis not what man does that exalts him,
But what man would do."

This doctrine is proclaimed unceasingly, and of course implies strong faith on the proclaimer's part that the Universe is sound at heart, not "a suck and a sell," which, alas! is so dolefully and wailfully, and with more or less tunefully sensual caterwaulings, the encouraging strain of our latest bardlets; but in all sober seriousness there is abroad now some dread paralyzing fear, that lays a cold, dead hand upon the purest and most generous hearts among us. And God knows—who permits Nature, Satan, and Man, his mimic, to commit such horrible atrocities as are committed every day and night upon this earth—there is excuse enough for agony and doubt! But in Browning we find no despair; he preaches energy at our life-task, doing our chosen work with all our might; he tells us to pierce below custom and convention, and lay hold of what is true, satisfying, and abiding in our spirits; yea, even when we fail in the eyes of the world, he assures us that we may trust God, the Father of our spirits, to perfect the good honest work we have begun, in His own best manner, and to renew our youth like the eagle's, if not here, then hereafter. Shockingly unscientific! Still, unless I completely misunderstand him, so Browning believes. "Andrea del Sarto," a very beautiful sketch, proclaims the imperfection of a perfection,

that has no trace of inability to grasp, hold, and express some infinitude of aspiration beyond the work actually accomplished.

“ Ah ! but a man's reach should exceed his grasp,
Or what's a heaven for? All is silver-grey,
Placid and perfect with my art—the worse.”

He notes how he could correct some wrong drawing of an arm in a painting by Raphael ; but feels how far the young painter soars above him, notwithstanding—(this may throw a side-light on our poet's own defective form). It is better to fail in technique than in more essential things, though good workmanship of course is infinitely to be desired. The great painter-poet, Blake, will occur to us, whose technique in painting, and rhythm in poetry were often defective. And so also with Byron, and Wordsworth.

The “Grammarians' Funeral,” again, vindicates the narrow limited life-work of a special student by the conception that he is justified in God's light, because he has eternity wherein to grow complete, and learn all other things. The full-orbed Divine idea is, indeed, *by* the imperfections of the isolated fragments of the curving line—by the letting go the straight line ; so by the restraint of chemical affinities is the nutrition for organization, and the performance of living functions possible. Things are not in their momentary appearances, however fair and complete these may seem ; they are fulfilled in their disappearance even, and their living again in richer form, wherein their old state is verily more its own true self than before ; for each is in and by others—must pass away to live : “ That which thou sowest is not quickened except it die : and God giveth it a body as it hath pleased Him.” So a rather discredited old book says. Three great writers see and teach this very distinctly—Hegel, Hinton, and Browning. Browning again and again expresses his strong belief in our personal immortality. You find that in “ Evelyn Hope,” “ La Saisiaz,” and elsewhere. He believes in compensation, the righting

of all wrong, the satisfaction of our highest and holiest aspirations, the eternal permanence of righteousness and love, the supplementing of utmost human weakness by that Divine Power, which is the very basis and essence of all endeavour, yea, of all life, however feeble, though to the confused judgment of sense it appear for ever lost and annihilated. Note the fine poem "Instans Tyrannus," where the poor mean victim of persecution becomes terrible to the tyrant when he *prays*, and *God* is seen standing by his side.

"Earth being so good, would Heaven seem best?
Now Heaven and she are beyond this ride,"

the baffled, but still loyal lover sings of the "Last Ride" his lady and he enjoyed together. This doctrine is best illustrated in the two noble philosophical poems, "Abt Vogler," and "Rabbi Ben Ezra," the former unique as a chant in praise of music, that youngest and most spiritual of the arts.

Notice next how strenuously Browning urges upon us *determination, strength of will*. Strong character may be warped, but twisted back again to good purpose, and even the warping, he holds, has a use. But namby-pamby negation of all character, what force and help is there in that? In this light we are to regard the "Statue and the Bust." Again, he will have no leaving of ill-savoured, inextricable entanglements of conduct to take care of themselves, and go on breeding low, deteriorated, corrupting growths. This is the idea in that terrible and most graphic narrative in his latest volume, "Ivan Ivanovitch," about the woman who, under whatever temptations, saved her own life at the expense of that of her children when pursued by wolves, and whom, after he has heard her apology, a strong man slays with his own private hand, the narrator approving. While in the "Inn Album," again, the young man does Heaven's justice, as if inevitably, with his own hands, on the old villain. In the grand ballad, "Gismond," the traitor's lie

can only be adequately refuted by the death of the traitor at the hands of the lady's avenger. And "Forgiveness" in "Pacchiarotto" has a similar issue. It is the teaching also of "Before," where the speaker advises the two men to fight it out, if the wrong-doer will not confess and ask pardon. But in "After," the view widens—

" Take the cloak from his face, and at first
 Let the corpse do its worst.
 How he lies in his rights of a man !
 Death has done all death can.
 And absorbed in the new life he leads,
 He recks not, he heeds
 Nor his wrong, nor my vengeance ; both strike
 On his senses alike,
 And are lost in the solemn and strange
 Surprise of the change.
 Ha ! what avails *death* to erase
 His offence, my disgrace ?
 I would we were boys as of old,
 In the field, by the fold !
 His outrage, God's patience, man's scorn
 Were so easily borne !
 I stand here now ; he lies in his place—
 Cover the face."

Next, we have many poems whose practical message is—break through customs and conventions, away from earthly greeds and mundane vanities, to learn that love is best, and free development of your own capacities, so far as that may be in this life ! I read this lesson in "Respectability," and notably in the "Flight of the Duchess," who, finding a true human heart beat under an old gipsy woman's forbidding garb and aspect, and initiated by her into a fair, liberal life, adapted to draw forth and satisfy the human cravings in her soul, stunted and withered among the heartless, starched Court puppets with whom her lot is cast, breaks away from the world of pageant to find a real one elsewhere.

Least notable of all, perhaps, are the poet's pure lyrics. For these are seldom an expression of personal feeling, so embodied as to be representative, as in supreme singers like

Burns, Heine, Leopardi, Shelley ; they are the result of a merely conceived alien mood, being often hard and harsh in sound. Yet one would not willingly have missed three or four beautiful ones, foremost among them being "Prosopice," "May and Death," and "April in England." They have sincerity, pathos, deep human feeling, and music, while the first-named is also remarkable for the writer's characteristic virile fortitude, and daring courage.

ROBERT BUCHANAN'S POETRY.*

EXCEPT by a clique, and perhaps by here and there a small literary buccaneer, who admires nobody but himself and the manes, or rather names, of departed greatness, whose hand is against every man and every man's against him, the merit of Mr. Buchanan's poetry is, I suppose, now pretty generally acknowledged.

Refined critics certainly objected in the first instance to Mr. Buchanan's choice of vulgar everyday subjects. But now they have been driven out of this position, and the new ground taken up against him by a certain school is that he has treated these subjects unpoetically. It is difficult to answer this except by saying that he *hasn't*—"Meg Blane" being one of the finest poems of the kind in the language—though occasionally, no doubt, he may be open to the charge. In the "Poems and Ballads of Life" the treatment is indeed somewhat slight; but if it were not so, dramatic propriety would be violated, because the poet's method is usually to relate his story through a third person who is in the same rather humble class of life as those whose fortunes he narrates. Now in a poem like "Widow Mysie," I think it may be conceded there *is* a certain com-

* Since this was written Mr. Buchanan has published a poem of wonderful beauty and noble significance, "Balder," also "Julia Cytherea," and "Phil Blood's Leap," a most spirited ballad. Of this order there are several very remarkable in his last volume, "Ballads of Love and Humour." I do not here allude to the grand prose romances, "The Shadow of the Sword," or "God and the Man,"

monness, even vulgarity of flavour, chiefly because the heroine is a commonplace person in commonplace circumstances; and while there is no tragic intensity in these, the humour is not subtle enough to redeem the superficial vulgarity of the subject. For poetry, surely the level of these lines, which gave the key-note of the whole, is low:—

“ Tam Love, a man prepared for friend or foe,
Whiskered, well-featured, tigt from top to toe.”

But on the whole, Mr. Buchanan in his narrative poems probably makes his people talk more *naturally* than any other verse-writer of the day. Ought girls of the lower class, like Nell and Liz, to speak in language concocted by a poet out of his own creditably familiar knowledge of the classics, the Italian poets, and Elizabethan English? It is averred by critics that they have no objection to Nell and Liz being heard in verse—they will condescend to listen to *them* even—but—but what? How does Shakespeare make his clowns, and hinds, and common soldiers, and Dogberries, and even Falstaffs talk? How does Tennyson his “Northern Farmer”? or his Tib and Joan in “Queen Mary”? By no means euphuistically. To my mind the pathetic simplicity of language in one of the most beautiful of these poems, “Liz,” is one of its chief merits, and on the whole the *form* of the poem is fully as excellent as the substance: if it were *more* remarkable, the poem of course would not be a quarter so good. Ought Scott to have made Halbert Glendinning or Mary Avenel use the same language as Sir Piercie Shafton?

Some finical, fastidious gentleman objected to the word “costermonger” in “Liz.” It made him stop his ears and give a little scream; but it was appropriate where it stood, and I am sorry Mr. Buchanan has altered it. He has “Joe Purvis” instead, and I am sure the gentleman will object to that equally. It should have been “Reginald Mauleverer,” so as not to offend ears polite. Speaking of

his indiarubber ball, the little boy said to his governess: "If you prick it, it will go squash!" "Oh shocking, my dear!" said the prim lady; "you should have said, 'If you puncture it, it will collapse.'" But Mr. Buchanan won't, I trust, make gravediggers call spades *effodiators*, or housemaids call coal-scuttles *Pandoras* (though, perhaps, they will soon in real life), for all his governesses may say to him. A poet may leave fine language of that kind to advertising tradesmen. The "Last of the Hangmen," however, seems to me too merely coarse and grotesque—not sufficiently spiritualized. He might do in a Dutch picture; but he is hardly elaborately realized enough for a poetic study even of the Dutch order.

It has been urged again that these poems are too *sentimental*: so that what seems to be desiderated is this—that costermongers and street women should say very hard, harsh, and commonplace things—perhaps blaspheme?—*only in turgid, euphuistic English*. Perhaps somebody was right when he said that Mr. Buchanan makes his townspeople and peasants talk a little too much about external nature—but there is generally something in their circumstances that affords a clue to that. Liz, in a very fine passage, expresses her horror of the country, which she had once visited. How would the critics set about presenting such people poetically at all—except by the aid of artificial euphuism? What Mr. Buchanan does is to take such men and women at moments and in moods when some circumstance of their lives brings out the finer and more human traits in them. Over them he sheds the mild light of sorrow, or the stormy glare of tragedy. And he rightly believes that there is this humanity of infinite worth in them all—desiring to clear them from the rags and grime that hide them from persons with pouncet boxes. So in death, common features may seem grand, and assume the semblance of some fairer, nobler relation. Well then, the poet does not make them leave out their h's, and does not

make them talk *argot*—that is another count in the very self-consistent indictment—but that may not be essential to them; he just indicates their rank by the speech; he makes it “poetical” enough not to be displeasing; not too “poetical” to be out of character altogether. I do not indeed say he might not do what is suggested, and yet leave them poetical enough, as Tennyson, Bret Harte, Col. John Hay, and others have done recently. Indeed he *has* done so in many pieces.

Picturesque the “dim common populations” are in some aspects, rugged, full of movement and colour, with none of their angles rubbed down in the social mill. And is it not well that a poet should take us with him into the heart of great cities, or into rude huts on the mountain side and on the shore, setting us face to face, heart to heart, with men and women—“fate-stricken” persons, often braving hunger and want, danger and despair, toiling ever to render easier life possible for us—making us know more wisely, because more lovingly, the very waifs, outcasts, and lost children of our human family? They who lounge at club windows, or write leaders for gentlemen, may like to shut out all that from them; it is an offence and a puzzle to them; only “false sentiment,” “philanthropy,” or something equally odious and *de mauvais ton* notices these things. “Odi profanum!” But let these persons be more tolerant of other tastes; let them cease to suppose that they in their cloisters or clubs are mouthpieces of what is soundest and most enduring in the heart of this nation. Why should they fancy, moreover, that they *know* so much more of these people than this poet who professes to have suffered and struggled with them—to have sprung from them—and to have *experienced* that there is a soul of good even in things evil; who, on the whole, with Walt Whitman, from whom he has learnt much, refuses to call anything—except the “fleshy school”—common or unclean? The people, in moments of emotion, *have* poetry of thought

and expression far more genuine than that of the genteel, and they *are* able to feel—if they have leisure, even to dwell upon their feelings—though they may not dwell so much upon them as we, nor make a luxury of the practice in their hard hand-to-hand fight with stern gross wants. I would not deny that these poems may be too uniformly tearful and sad; nevertheless, the poet has humour very salt and genuine too: I wish he would use that faculty oftener. Poets have it seldom nowadays. Herein, as in other ways, Buchanan sometimes reminds one of Burns.

No doubt such metrical stories have been written before. We have Shenstone, Crabbe, Clare, E. Elliot, and, above all, Wordsworth. But such idyls have not been written, I think, about the inhabitants of cities. To our great novelist, Charles Dickens, we chiefly owe an interest about and knowledge of modern cities, and while Nell a little reminds us of Oliver Twist, Angus Blane in one respect reminds us of Barnaby Rudge. But Mr. Buchanan's best things are essentially poems, and not novels. Though he has been influenced by his great master—and by that other great master, Wordsworth, who in "Michael" and the "Excursion" led us to feel the nobility and pathos of common life—yet he is thoroughly original. As to Crabbe, though in him there is "iron pathos," and grim realistic tragedy, yet, *as a rule*, I cannot feel in him the consecration of the "light that never was on sea or land." And there is surely very little verbal music in Crabbe. It is photography. The details are not selected.

"John," "Kittie Kemble," and "De Berny," all seem to belong to Mr. Buchanan's inferior work—in them the *motif* is too slight, and the metre hardly seems to have sufficient *raison d'être*, while neither that nor the diction is for its own sake striking. Such sketches are clever, but one can hardly accept them as poems. Mr. Buchanan writes a great deal, and perhaps no one's work is less equal; but great inequality may be predicated of the best

poets. As Byron says to Murray, "What poem is good all through? You may think yourself lucky if half 'Don Juan' be good." It may be said that most of Gray and Campbell is good; but are Gray and Campbell in the first order of poets? And *are they good all through?* Certainly not, unless mere "correct," or tumid, bombastic diction makes good poetry—without fire, without emotion, without vision. Yet, Campbell's odes, and Gray's "Elegy" are admirable beyond question. Mr. Swinburne says of Byron that you are never secure in him from some hideous dislocation of pinion when he is in full flight. I think that may be true. But you have, unfortunately, to choose between this and a poet who, while remaining on the ground, flaps and beats his wings as if he were flying, or else plays tricks, as of a tumbler pigeon, in mid-air. What poet always soars, and never collapses, or plays fantastic tricks? "Aliquando bonus dormitat Homerus." And if so, what of the rest?

In estimating a poet's position I fancy we must ask—not, What bad things has he done? or, What defects are there in his work? but, How good are his best things? and, perhaps, How many good things has he done? To me it seems that there are in Sydney Dobell, and Alexander Smith, a few passages, even lyrics, of such transcendent excellence as almost to counterbalance the marvellous want of organic unity in their productions; yet, these being only passages, one hesitates where to place them—though indeed "the Roman" is good all through. In Buchanan, however, you have poems good, not passages merely. And the question is, therefore, *How good* are those poems?

What is especially striking about "Nell" is the intensity of its passion; every word sinks home; its brevity gives it high tragic power. "Poetic diction," and ingenious metrical effects would simply *ruin* that poem. The lines—

"I stopped, and had some coffee at a stall,
Because I felt so chill,"

in their place are intensely poetical, exactly because there is no "poetic diction" about them. These women are as noble too as Chaucer's Patient Griseld is.

I hardly know any one who can draw such telling pictures in a few words, or set before you a group of figures with their background so distinctly, as if by a flash of lightning issuing out of the darkness of stormy night.

Before proceeding to notice more particularly "Meg Blane," I would express regret at not seeing in this collection "Attorney Sneak," an exceedingly humorous piece; but I am glad to see "Tim O'Hara," and the "Starling," of the same order.

Meg Blane was a kind of sailor woman, rough and gaunt, yet with a woman's nature. She had lived with a man as his wife: he had gone to sea, and she knew not what was become of him. With her, in her hut by the shore, abode her full-grown, half-witted son, and the love these two bore one another is described with much beauty. Of the boldest was Meg Blane in perilous adventures by sea, but she yearned ever, like a true woman, after the absent. One night there was a great storm, which is depicted with intense power. Meg Blane gets some men to go with her in a boat out to a wreck, which breaks up before they reach it; but one man was drifted on shore alive, and borne to a cottage, where Meg afterwards goes to see him while he lies asleep and exhausted. She recognizes in this man her old lover; and most powerful is the picture of this. She withdraws, and returns later—but troubled, and wondering to herself that the joy seems less absolute than she had fancied all these years it would be. Intensely dramatic and moving is the representation of the interview wherein she learns, on presenting to him the half-witted Angus as their "bairn," that he is married and has children! Some of the most lovely lyrical lines in the language follow:—

" Lord, with how small a thing
 Thou canst prop up a heart against the grave !
 A little glimmering
 Is all we crave ;
 The lustre of a love that hath no being ;
 The pale point of a little star above,
 Flashing and fleeing,
 Contents our seeing.
 The house that never will be built ; the gold
 That never will be told ;
 The task we leave undone when we are cold ;
 The dear face that returns not, but is lying
 Licked by the leopard in an Indian cave ;
 The coming rest that cometh not, till sighing,
 We turn our tremulous gaze upon the grave !
 And Lord ! how shall we dare
 Thither in peace to fall,
 But for a feeble glimmering even there,
 Falsest perchance of all ?
 We are as children in Thy hands indeed !
 And thou hast easy comfort for our need :
 The shining of a lamp, the tinkling of a bell,
 Content us well.

" In poverty, in pain,
 For weary years and long,
 One faith, one fear, had comforted Meg Blane,
 Yea, made her brave and strong ;
 A faith so faint, it seemed not faith at all :
 Rather a trouble, and a dreamy fear,
 A hearkening for a voice, for a footfall,
 She never hoped in sober heart to hear.
 This had been all her cheer :
 Yet with this balm
 Her soul might have slept calm
 For many another year."

But after this hope failed her she lost her courage at sea,
 her heart for toil on land ; poor Angus, who depended on her,
 suffered, and was sad as partaking of her sorrow ; and this
 was bitter to her—the stern woman became hard toward
 men, and fretful, and knew she had not long to live.

" ' O bairn, when I am dead,
 How shall ye keep frae harm ?
 What hand will gie ye bread ?
 What fire will keep ye warm ?
 How shall ye dwell on earth awa' frae me ?'
 ' O mither, dinna dee ! '

“ ‘ O bairn, it is but closing up the een,
 And lying down never to rise again :
 Many a strong man's sleeping hae I seen ;
 There is nae pain.
 I'm weary, weary, and I scarce ken why ;
 My summer has gone by :
 And sweet were sleep but for the sake o' thee !'
 ' O mither, dinna dee !'

“ When summer scents and sounds were on the sea,
 And all night long the silvern surge plashed cool,
 Outside the hut she sat upon a stool,
 And with thin fingers fashion'd carefully,
 While Angus leant his head against her knee,
 A long white dress of wool.
 ' O mither,' cried the man, ' what make ye there ?
 A blanket for our bed !
 O mither ! it is like the shroud folk wear
 When they are drown'd and dead !'
 And Meg said naught, but kissed him on the lips,
 And looked with dull eye seaward, where the moon
 Blackened the white sails of the passing ships,
 Into the Land where she was going soon.”

The man soon followed her. There is a most extraordinary Celtic glamour about this poem, penetrating through the intense and rugged realism of it. And this it is which the author truly conceives to be one great characteristic of his work—though he insists upon the “mysticism” of it almost too strenuously—which exasperates all those (the majority even of intelligent people) who detest “mysticism”—does not Mr. Swinburne call philosophy “a pestilential and holy jungle”?—besides indicating a tendency which, I fancy, might become prejudicial to his remarkable realistic human faculty in poetry. Thus Mr. Buchanan himself has perceived that his long “Drama of Kings” was, on the whole, a failure; and I cannot help thinking that the mystical element here unduly prevailed over the human. I shall hardly be suspected of undervaluing philosophy, or the mysterious spiritual element in poetry; but in his presentation of the Napoleons and Bismarck, Mr. Buchanan did not give one the impression of so firm a grasp upon

individualities as he does in his portraits from low life. There is much more complexity in characters of this kind, and they are, before all, *men of action*—their ends being chiefly tangible and practical, however large, and therefore to some extent ideal. Celebrated statesmen may be prominent instruments in the carrying out of certain universal laws, which thinkers may be able to detect; but very seldom are such laws uppermost in their thoughts, even if consciously grasped by their understanding at all. "With how little wisdom is the world governed!" and yet might it not be worse governed with more? It is in the delineation of simpler, ruder natures, swayed by deep emotions, and but half-consciously influenced by the grand wild natural elements around, that Mr. Buchanan excels—what can be finer, for instance, than his "Tiger Bay," and his picture of the tigerish would-be murderess watching the sleeping sailor in some low lodging of Ratcliffe Highway—not of the whole scene merely, but of the subtle play, and shifting of emotions in the wild woman's mind, till the better prevail—with that companion picture of an actual tiger in a jungle?

The great Napoleon is, indeed, depicted with some dramatic skill; but the very fragmentary glimpse of him we get in his dispute with the queen and cardinal somehow fails to satisfy; and his solitary broodings, though striking, and possibly appropriate, do not seem sufficient to fill up the portrait of him quite characteristically. We have the same feeling as regards the portraiture of Bismarck, and the Third Napoleon; though one is rather more satisfied with the latter, who indeed seems to have been a brooding, irresolute, somewhat shallow and pretentious person. But here more elaboration, more distinction of poetic language and metre, might have been efficacious in raising the work to a higher poetic level. In fact, one wants here a real drama with movement and development. There is an absence, moreover, of Mr. Buchanan's special merit—con-

densation, terseness, intensity. The choruses and semi-choruses are unequal, and too numerous; nor does their moral and intellectual generality seem to harmonize with the fragmentary realistic glimpses of actual passing events—too familiar, because too little spiritualized; less still do I like the imitation of Goethe's supernatural Faust machinery. Out of Shelley (not to say, in Shelley), one can scarcely read choruses and semi-choruses *ad libitum*, and not rebel. The whole thing in Shelley is sublimated; it passes in an æthereal region of unearthly and seraphic loveliness.

There is, perhaps, a danger lest "the mystic" should not accept life in all its variety and interaction; and too arbitrarily selecting from his own standpoint what seems to him individually most significant and lofty, the dramatist or narrator may thus too easily become the preacher or moraliser, sliding into turgid and nebulous generalities—far removed from the living order of Shakespeare's creations—or at least into monotonous mannerism of treatment; and this, even though he may not be ready to swallow whole merely conventional views of virtue. There is always, moreover, a danger of a man posing as mystic or prophet, and contemplating himself in that character—a danger to his insight and art of the same kind as would arise from his considering too much what will make him immediately popular with the many, or with a clique.

Still there are passages of much excellence in this long book, and the author here reprints some of the best of the lyrical ones under the title of "Political Mystics" and "Songs of the Terrible Year." "Titan and Avatar" is in parts particularly fine, Titan being the People, or the Spirit of Man, and Avatar the great Napoleon. The curse on him pronounced by Titan, whom he has misled with false though specious promises, lured by false fires for his own ends, on whom he has brought so much misery and desolation, is especially striking. The great anarch is doomed

to wither away on the lonely rock of St. Helena—as Haydon has painted him—

“Till like a wave, worn out with silent breaking,
Or like a wind blown weary, thou forsaking
Thy tenement of clay,
Shalt wear and waste away,
And grow a portion of the ever-waking
Tumult of cloud and sea. Feature by feature
Losing the likeness of the living creature,
Returning back thy form
To its elements of storm,
Thou shalt dissolve in the great wreck of Nature!”

A sweeping resonant lyric, too, is the “Song of the Sword,” supposed to be sung by the Germans on the coronation of their Emperor in the Hall of Mirrors at Versailles.

“Artist and Model” is a poem which I should fancy might commend itself even to the most euphuistic of persons with pouncet boxes, who refuse to let common things and common words come between the wind and their nobility—who invent felicitous, periphrastic disguises for the nakedness of all vulgar little ands or buts—who white the sepulchre, and, like certain tribes, cover the face decorously, leaving other parts exposed. But probably the diction of this poem would seem to them too simple, direct, and exquisitely compliant to the delicate mould and subtle movement of suggested thought or tender emotion. This is just, however, what fulfils my Philistine idea of good expression, and good form, which I also, in my poor way, value.

I shall now say a word about the “Book of Orm.” The more it is read, the more it grows on you. On the whole, I cannot sufficiently express my admiration. Its loose rhythms are usually most skilful, musical, and fascinating. These, harmonizing well with the whole conception, which is Celtic in character, impress you with a sense of originality, as the varied metres of the “Drama of Kings”

somehow did not. The poem is no less than a contribution in poetic cypher toward the solution of some universal problems—ambitious this!—yet the poet has fairly grasped some of the best thought of the time, even if he have not quite mastered the world's foremost thinkers. But what is distinctively his own, and of the highest artistic import here, is the manner in which he has seen and successfully presented a few very striking ideas, invested with vivid, noble, and appropriate forms, rising out of the depths of a personal, boldly creative, and profoundly emotional imagination.

“The Vision of the World without Death” is a most admirable attempt to show the use, and even consoling influence of visible death, as also of resting-places for mortal ashes. I am sorry for any who fail to feel the marvellous beauty of this part. In its magical pathos the picture of the mother losing her children without seeing them die is unsurpassable. All this shows a very high and rare imagination.

“And stilly in the starlight came I backward
To the forest where I missed him, and no voices
Brake the stillness as I stooped down in the starlight,
And saw two little shoes filled up with dew,
And no mark of little footsteps any further,
And knew my little daughter had gone also.”

In “Songs of Seeking” the author shows his very characteristic grasp of the great truth which so few can feel, that wickedness is not absolute—not final, therefore; nor Doom—that there is “a soul of good in things evil;” that “God hath made even the wicked to praise Him,” in a far profounder sense than that in which the doctrine of everlasting damnation teaches it. Very beautiful, in their spontaneous informal melody, are the stanzas named “Quest” and the “Lamb of God.”

“As in the snowy stillness,
Where the stars shine greenly
In a mirror of ice,
The reindeer abideth alone,

And speedeth swiftly
 From her following shadow
 In the moon,
 I speed for ever
 From the mystic shape
 That my life projects,
 And my soul perceives,
 And I loom for ever
 Through desolate regions
 Of wondrous thought,
 And I fear the thing
 That follows me.
 Doth thy winged lightning
 Strike, O Master!
 The timid reindeer,
 Flying her shade?
 Will thy wrath pursue me,
 Because I cannot
 Escape the shadow
 Of the thing I am?"

"God's Dream" is really a profound poem. "The Lifting of the Veil" is a vivid, imaginative picture of what would happen to men and women if they did know the whole mystery of God, which they mourn they cannot know. The "Seeds," too, is a most notable lyric of the development of life, consciousness, power, and pain. The "Devil's Mystics" are surely somewhat obscure, especially "Roses:" I was glad to see the *Spectator's* exposition, which Mr. Buchanan reprints and accepts. His Devil is the incarnation of Evil regarded as Defect. This very familiar metaphysical conception does not lend itself easily, however, to *personal* symbolism. This mystic "Devil" becomes necessarily a kind of *beneficent* being, and so loses his very distinctive nature as Devil: as a spirit of evil. To try to render this idea concrete is to fail. Nevertheless, the last lines are extremely suggestive, and might be taken by the author as his motto:—

"The voice cried out, 'Rejoice, rejoice!
 There shall be sleep for evil!
 And all the sweetness of God's Voice
 Passed strangely through the Devil.'"

The "Song of Deicides" is extremely vigorous and clever; but the "Vision of the Man Accurst" is a truly grand imaginative effort, and embodies the central truth of Christianity, that utter self-sacrificing love is divine, and is alone capable of prevailing over evil—which truth has been embodied in a supreme manner by Victor Hugo in his "Misérables." If it were not that, perhaps, the shadowy, phantom-like genius of the whole poem demands it, one might complain of a certain want of complex detail and coherence in the imagery here—but it is Ossianic, and fine in its own large, vague Brocken-spectre style. One "man accurst" alone is not saved from sin, though all beside are saved. He is cast out from Heaven, and blasphemes in a wild region of ice. At length God asks if any will go forth and voluntarily share his doom. At last his mother and his wife go forth from bliss to the loathsome thing, and "kiss his bloody hands." "The one he slew in anger—the other he stript, with ravenous claws, of raiment and of food." "Nevertheless," says the wife—

"I will go forth with him whom ye call curst ;
 I have kis't his lips ; I have lain upon his breast ;
 I bare him children, and I closed his eyes ;
 I will go forth with him.' . . .
 . . . A piteous human cry, a sob forlorn
 Thrilled to the heart of Heaven. The man wept ;
 And in a voice of most exceeding peace
 The Lord said, while against the breast divine
 The waters of life leapt gleaming, gladdening,
 'The man is saved : let the man enter in !'"

Still one feels inclined to congratulate Mr. Buchanan on his having dropped the prophet in his anonymous works, "St. Abe," and "White Rose." He has gained variety of human interest by dropping it. In these works he shows, besides matured humour and satirical faculty, dramatic genius also, as journals hostile to Mr. Buchanan (either from personal reasons, or because their editors were dominated, one supposes, by certain cliques, wedded to a

particular school), observed only too truly and naïvely, not knowing, unfortunately, of whom they thus wrote! The prosaic baldness, triviality, bad taste, and over-blankness, which certainly do disfigure some of his earlier work, have in these narratives entirely disappeared; while the narratives are much more rich and complex as studies of character, of persons in their mutual life-influence on one another, than anything which has preceded. Thoroughly sincere and graphic studies of external Nature also occur. Notable here, as usually in the author's work, are its artistic totality and clearness of outline; also the racy, nervous, direct Anglo-Saxon strength of its language, for which we must go otherwise at the present day to Tennyson, or to Professor J. Nichol's admirable "Hannibal," and "Themistocles," to J. A. Symonds, and Sir H. Taylor's dramas; or back to Byron, Wordsworth, Pope, and Chaucer—notable, too, its absence of affectation, artifice, and general excess. There is no poverty of matter, or extravagance of manner. All this used to be thought essential in the time of Aristotle, and even since. It used to be thought "classical." But academies have changed their minds. Of course, one may lay too much stress on self-restrained symmetry, and clearness. "Endymion" is beautiful poetry, and Gifford's "Baviad" is nothing of the sort. Gold ore is better than polished brass snuffers. Still these qualities are something; for they are essential to the greatest artists—for instance, to Æschylus, Sophocles, and Homer.

Yet in the early work, fine as it often was for intensity, and severity of outline, the colouring was almost fatiguing in its lurid and fiery brilliancy; one longed for a little more repose, more delicate complexity of subtly varying hues, more gradations, more half-notes, more tendernesses of shadow, more development of character, such as one finds in life, and in external Nature. Here we have much of all this, without losing breadth and decision of touch, or depth and lustre of tint. Splendidly vivid is the Boss's

tale in "St. Abe;" admirably humorous are the feminine whispers in church during Brigham's sermon; the sketch of Abe Clewson's seven wives; and the close analysis of his own character, partly contained in his last epistle to the polygamists of Utah, in which he relates how he fell in love with his own wife—his last and youngest, who also loved him—and how they fled together, he seriously describing himself years after as not saintly enough for Mormonism.

But "White Rose and Red" is in some respects Mr. Buchanan's greatest poem. I never read a criticism I thought more ludicrously at sea than that in the *Spectator*, which declared that this poem was remarkable, not for its humanity, but for its descriptions of Nature. These, indeed, are as good as possible, whether luscious tropical descriptions at the beginning, or those of the Great Snow, or that of Drowsietown. But it is the human pictures that one most prizes here. Magnificent is the portrayal of the hunter's capture by bathing Indian women; as also of Red Rose, the wild Indian girl, who fell in love with Eureka Hart, the tall, handsome "beaver-minded" white hunter, while he roamed in his youth through a tropical forest—splendid the relation of her tropical love for him, and its transfiguration, not of him, alas! but of his image in her soul. Yet no one without keen humour touched with pity could have done this. While he begins to dream of civilization and proprieties, and her fierce love begins to bore him, she imagines, looking in his fine face, he is brooding over all kinds of Divine projects—the beaver! Then he says he must go, but he will return—and he means it. He gives her a paper scrawled in blood with his name and address. He comes not; she follows him over many weary lands through the Great Snow. She arrives at a cottage door at last with his child—a mighty storm is raging—*his wife* opens!—a white little wife—to whom before fainting she shows this paper! That White

Rose, Phœbe, is admirably painted, in contrast to Red Rose, and all the alternations of her feeling when she knows the truth: she is proper, somewhat cold, civilized, not too much in love, yet kind and good. The man enters; Red Rose clings to him, still full of faith! The humour of the situation almost predominates over the pathos here. Poor treacherous beaver! He does not know what to do between the two women. He had got back; he wanted to "settle down;" perhaps Red Rose would forget him, in time; and what would Parson Pendon say to his marrying a red squaw—not a Christian? Shocking! And then he fell in love—for the first time *in love*—with Phœbe Anna—so they were married. Noble in the extreme and graphic is the account of Red Rose's terrible journey to find him. Soon after arriving she dies—nursed by White Rose, with Eureka Hart by; she still believing in him, and that they shall meet in those happy prairies which are the Indian's Heaven. Alas! alas! White Rose pardons him—and he, did he forget Red Rose? Never!

"Often, while

He sat and puff'd his pipe with easy smile,
 Surveying fields and orchards from the porch,
 And far away the little village church,
 While all seemed peaceful, earth and air and sky,
 A twinkle came into his fish-like eye:
 'Poor critter!' sigh'd he, as a cloud he blew,
 'She was a splendid figure, and that's true!'"

Grim tragi-comedy! The metres are sparkling and facile; everybody talks, not in poetic diction or heroics, but as everybody would; and the poet's humour plays like a lambent flame over all. There is a good deal of Chaucer, Burns, and Byron here; yet the poem is thoroughly original—queer, sensuous, tender, serious, wonderful, like life; as I said, the more so that the poet is for the nonce no prophet, and forgets how angry he has been with the "fleshy school!" The writer's power of painting external Nature has greatly matured. There are no more admirable

descriptions extant than in his prose-work on the Hebrides, where also we find one of his most magically affecting tales, "Eiradh of Canna."

Mr. Buchanan has written some very noble sonnets; "Faces on the Wall," and those called "Coruisken," that open the "Book of Orm," and most powerfully mirror the sublime, desolate scenery of Loch Coruisk, embodying also corresponding moods of desolate doubt and dim aspiration. He occasionally gives us delicate fancies, breathing an aroma of evanescent emotion, such as "Clari in the Well," and "Charmian." But in the moralized weird and mystical, and in the spiritualized real, is he most at home. A wonderful piece of work of that kind is the "Ballad of Judas Iscariot," with its high moral. The "Dead Mother," and "Lord Roland's Wife" too are steeped in a similar magical atmosphere, but have a more tenderly human pathos.

The following strange, arresting lines among others express the writer's central idea most forcibly:—

"O Pan! O Pan! thou art not dead:
 Ghost-like, O Pan! thou glimmerest still,
 A spectral face with sad dumb stare;
 On rainy nights thy breath blows chill
 In the street-walker's dripping hair!"
 By lonely meres thou dost not wait;
 But *here*, 'mid living waves of Fate,
 We feel thee go and come."

So, accordingly, the poet gives us beautiful lyrics, like a "Spring Song in the City," the "City Asleep," and "Two Sons," as well as powerful sketches like "Barbara Gray." His utterance here is bold to a degree; he looks beyond what the conventional world, religious or worldly, may *say* is right, to that which is more absolutely right; even as it is also in accordance with the best instincts of this plain, but not loveless woman's heart. The man wronged and left her; she went astray with him; but none else had brought love into her narrow and unlovely life: so, as he lies dead in the grim London room, deformed and un-

beautiful himself, she forgives, kisses him, and loves on. Of course the "Art for art" school will say that a poet has no business to teach even by implication, to have or express any moral convictions of his own. That I deny. What do they make of Shelley, and Dante? I say this poem is an artistic glorification of the meanest possible subject, and as such a triumph of art. It is more elevating than the skilful presentation of natures, however brilliant, in lower or more evil moods. That may be done most artistically; but it does not open out to the soul the same infinite vistas, tinged with light from above. If there be nobler spiritual elements, and a moral law with sanctions in our nature, the highest art cannot afford to ignore these in dealing with man: the art that does so distorts, or is most contracted in scope. High art will either create high types, contrasting them with low, or look for hidden larger issues and relations in the low. The highest art does not treat man as if he were but an insignificant member of his own generative organ.

Skill in portrayal is essential, and that includes *style*; but the point of view selected, and the kind of insight displayed mark the difference between high and low art. This seems not to be understood by a certain school of critics. According to their teaching, the skilful painter of a plum should be equal to the skilful painter of a Last Judgment, or a Cornaro family—the late Mr. Hunt to Michael Angelo, or Titian. But however skilful Teniers may be, Raphael, who showed equal skill in higher spiritual regions, is a greater painter. Homer, too, is greater—*yet not a more skilful*—poet than Horace, or Theocritus. A very skilful cook or cobbler—is he as great an artist as a very skilful architect? The real difficulty, of course, is to balance greater insight, feeling, and organizing imagination in the one case against greater technical excellence in the other, where these qualities do not exist equally proportioned in two writers. According to the bias of individual

judgments, there must always be variation in the verdicts. That technical skill is essential is so certain, that no fool ever disputed it. The only difference and question in this connection which arises is—*what is* skill in dealing with a given subject, *and who shows it?*

Merely didactic, expository, or analytic verse is not poetry—large portions, therefore, of Lucretius, of Mr. Browning, and of that really magnificent poem by Mr. Domett, “Ranolf and Amohia,” are not. But in Pope always, in Dryden sometimes, we have wit playing through all, like a spiritual flame; in other similar poems we have humour. All original poets flush the lives or objects they behold with emotional light from the depths of their own souls; but this light is a revealing, not a misleading one, whether it shine specially upon sensuous and æsthetic, or upon moral and intellectual aspects; others partaking of the same human sympathies are enabled thereby to see as the poet sees: this is the true transfiguring light of art. Some, however, not gifted with the requisite human elements, how clever and cultivated soever, can only mock and decry. And “criticism,” as commonly understood, means the mockery of malice, or incompetence. But general, as well as concrete truth has been, and may yet be poetically presented.

Some poets again are more in harmony with their own age's most advanced standpoint than others—but a man may be either superficially, or more profoundly, and less apparently in harmony with it. While low clouds are moving one way, high clouds may be moving another; yet the movement of nether mists may be most evident to careless glances of the many—everybody can see which way the straws blow; but because I believe Mr. Buchanan to have given adequate expression in imaginative rhythmical form to some of the deepest special perceptions and ideal aims of the time, I believe him to be one of our foremost living poets, and destined to become (directly or indirectly) one of our most influential.

A STUDY OF WALT WHITMAN.

To me, I will begin by owning at the outset, Walt Whitman appears as one of the largest and most important figures of the time. Of those who have publicly expressed a somewhat similar conviction, may be mentioned Mr. Rossetti, Mr. Conway, Mr. Robert Buchanan, Professor Dowden, and Mr. Emerson.

I think that what delights and arrests one most is the general impression he gives of nature, strength, health, individuality—his relish of all life is so keen, intense, catholic—the grasp of his faith is so nervous and tremendous—as he says, “My feet are tenon’d and mortis’d in granite.” One of the notes of a man of genius is, that through life he remains a child; and there is something eminently child-like in Whitman. He is full of naïf wonder and delight—each thing, every time he looks upon it, flashes upon him with a sense of eternal freshness and surprise; nor is anything to him common or unclean; but an aërial glory, as of morning, utterly insensible to vulgar eyes, bathes and suffuses all. He is tall, colossal, luxuriant, unpruned, like some giant tree in a primæval forest, whose feet root profoundly in a virgin soil. He springs out of the vast American continent full-charged with all that is special and national in it, in a super-eminant degree representative of all that is richest and most fresh (as well as of somewhat that is unlovely) in the American life which, more fully than any other, embodies the present age’s own indi-

viduality ; yet in that very continent there flutter also some of the feeblest, most contemptible, and emasculate of poeticals, and criticasters—faint echoes of an echo, pale, feeble, ineffectual copies of European literature, with all the native marrow, and all the vital sap and savour gone out of them. America is the land of Emerson, Hawthorne, Thoreau, Longfellow, Lowell ; but also of the mocking-bird. Whitman is very far from being hopeless and disdainful of his time ; he does not, as many really great writers of his country have done, prefer distant lands, enriched with long and eventful histories, for his theme ; he takes his own country and his own time, however ignoble they may seem to some fastidious tastes ; he is by no means himself uninfluenced by the special errors and special weaknesses of these ; but he is withal magnificently pregnant with a seer's half-articulate previsions, with a prophet's triumphant anticipations of that larger and more generous human future, which is surely about to issue out of these travailing loins, and from these ominous birthpangs of the present. He is American democracy incarnate ; and however much that leaves to be desired, yet it is great. He is, indeed, more prophet than artist. He very seldom retires to create deliberate imaginative wholes, in whose many diverse forms may be incarnated the truths he sees and must utter, the mastering emotions which dominate his soul. You never cease to see the man Walt Whitman. But then it is a very noble, and I contend a very poetic, personality you see—one in which, as in a magic crystal, all these men and women of the world, all the sights of city and of landscape, find themselves mirrored with most astonishing distinctness. He is too eager, too excited, to linger and to weave artistic poems out of his materials ; yet in the flash of the dark-lantern he turns upon them for a moment as he passes, though they too often appear isolated and disjunct, they dart out upon you with all the marvellous solidity and reality which their images have in nature. It is certainly

a *poet's* glance which has been poured upon them—piercing, remaking them ; not the glance of an *analyst*, a practical man, or one apathetic and indifferent. It is always one of intense enjoyment, from complete vision of the essence and heart of a thing. This atmosphere of keen buoyant personal sympathy and pleasure is more marked in Whitman than in any one else ; it is wonderfully bracing and refreshing to breathe. All the stale heaps of common, familiar things seem to leap up into their proper vitality as he passes : they glow like dingy metal filings in some brilliant light. And if he were otherwise, more of an ordinary artist, we should lose this refreshing novel sense of intense yet catholic and *impersonal personality*, which is so eminently characteristic of Walt Whitman. He seems to revel in his own life, and equally in that of every man, woman, and child he meets or can imagine. Now that so many people say and sing that they are weary and tired and despairing, that the world is worn out, and that you must go back to the classics, or mediæval themes for any objects of warm poetic interest, that life now is “a suck and a sell, and its end a bit of threadbare crape,” this spectacle of a poet and a man, like a very child, rejoicing in all the teeming forces and energies of this vulgar world of ours—this surely is something at least novel and “sensational.”

True it is, however, that Whitman comes of the people ; his past life has been active, adventurous, healthy, varied, and broadly human in experience. He dare not set himself above them, above the meanest of them, and look down from a height serenely benevolent upon them ; he claims to be one with them ; and what he sees more vividly than they, glories in more supremely, is—that he is, not an elect, a very intellectual or refined man, but a man, and has men and women for brothers and sisters. This honest and unfeigned use of greatness in rendering service rather than in exacting it—in pouring self out for the enrichment of mankind rather than in cunningly playing upon the weaknesses

of mankind for one's own glory—this is after the ancient type of heroism, after Christ, "friend of publicans and sinners," the Divinest Son of Man, who "drew all men to Himself;" and one can well understand the personal fascination and influence which we are informed Whitman is exercising upon so many of the youth of America. The life familiar to him is the picturesque, free, unconventional life of the people—not the pale, monotonous, artificial life of literary student, aristocrat, or plutocrat. He enters profoundly into all their difficulties, enjoyments, sorrows, and eager aspirations. Then, too, he has been in the great civil war, and been keenly penetrated with the noblest (as well as the less noble, but still powerfully human) of its principles and ideas. And in that war he was present personally in the sublimest and most heroic of capacities—he ministered constantly to the wounded on both sides, on the field and in the hospital. Such a man, therefore, has had exceptional advantages as man—and the raw material being heroic such is the result. We who stay at home in the old country, with old traditions, vices, and prejudices rank in our ancient blood, nurtured under the grand, yet somewhat chilling shadow of "time-honoured institutions"—we cannot pretend to call ourselves men of the age as that man can call himself man of the age. But of book-learning, of refined, inherited culture-inculcated accents, words, and ways, Whitman has probably little—so far, he has not, perhaps, had all advantages, though, whether they would not have cramped and injured *him*, is to me very questionable.

There are those, I know, who affirm that a poet can never (except quite indirectly) be a teacher or a prophet. This is again a critical dictum so removed from me that I do not pretend to understand it. I should have thought it depended on *how* he taught and prophesied—whether in doing so his whole nature was afire or not, his imagination and his heart all aglow about the chariot way of his reason; for otherwise Isaiah and Jeremiah, Lucretius and Shelley,

would be no poets, which on the whole I rather take leave to doubt. But it resolves itself, of course, into a dispute about words.

If, again, a poet must necessarily mean a metrist after our established English models, certainly Whitman is none. His expression, indeed, must be admitted to be often slovenly, inadequate, clumsy, and harsh; sometimes even stilted, bombastic, and inflated. But it is very far from uniformly or generally this. I read indeed in a leading review how it was now an axiom unquestioned by any judicious person that subject-matter in poetry was nothing, and style, expression, was everything. I felt terribly disconcerted at always having to believe exactly the opposite of all that is so categorically, and without argument laid down by our infallible oracles; but really that did seem startling to the uninitiated mind. Whether a poet has anything to say, to bring out, to express, is of no consequence whatsoever. Whether it be nothing or something, whether it be nonsense or wisdom, empty wind or inspired revelations, gibberings of an idiot, pulings of a sentimentalist, or utterances of sublime imagination and divine passion—all this is of absolutely no account; if only there be alliterations, and labials, and rotundities of sound in the slipping of any, or of either of these things off the tongue, he who gives vent to them is a poet, in either case equally a poet; but if there be not quite enough of these sounds, whatever else there be, by no means, and on no account a poet. Well, then, must not musical glasses be a poet? And since it would certainly be possible to weave intricacies of sound more exquisite and more varied by discarding altogether that old-fashioned hampering obligation of conceiving, imagining, and feeling with strength sustained enough to keep coherence, harmony, and distinctness among the ideal links we forge, would it not on these principles be well to lay down *ex cathedrâ* the grand, if novel axiom, that true poetry can only, and shall only consist of nonsense

verses? On the contrary, I venture to believe that expression implies meanings to be expressed, and that the most perfect expression is that which most transparently and impressively fits, and shows off the meaning.

The charm of "Don Juan" is surely in its wonderful adaptation of measure to all clear, luscious beauty of the pictures, all free, incommoded movements of the story, all sparkling turns of satire, humour, and wit; there is here no deliberate concoction of "blessed words like Mesopotamia," no triumphant exultation in the invention of novel tricks for saying ordinary things that must be said in a roundabout, coxcombical, and unintelligible manner, which now (as in the days of Euphues, Donne, and the Della Cruscans), appears to be considered the one essential of great poetry. Wordsworth hoped vainly that he had refuted that. I refuse to call him a great master of expression with whom words, whether in prose or verse, are not before all a medium of meaning; if they are employed with all manner of tricks and artifice, primarily for their own sakes, and the meaning has very much to take its chance of sanity and wholeness among them (the effect being that of a kaleidoscope, where bright broken fragments of ideas keep shifting their combinations in an endless and bewildering fashion), whatever the music of the sound be, it is not good expression, but the very worst. Poetry in this case usurps the place of music, for words can never be mere sound, but always must remain symbolic sound with a determined meaning.

Shelley himself, for example, wonderful poet as he is, was often carried into totally inadequate expression by his exquisite ear for melodious sound, though his melody and harmony are glorious when they rise spontaneously into heaven, immediately responsive to the soaring and expansive impulse within, wholly obedient to the burst of impetuous imagination, to the divine stress and swell of immense human sympathies.

But of a poet—a maker, a seer, a singer—must first of all be demanded if he can make and feel and see; then afterwards, if he can sing. Yet the chances are that if he answer “yes” to the first question, you are almost safe in leaving the other unasked. It is the very meaning and essence of poetry that a man who can make in the region of the ideal, who can feel and imagine (unless he be by nature impelled to some other than verbal form of plastic expression), will necessarily be driven to some form of rhythmical utterance. I do not depreciate the most gifted in the region of melodious metrical expression. I magnify them. If they have other things yet more essential, they are by far the most perfect of our poets; only Byron and Wordsworth, whose melody was less perfect than that of Shelley or Coleridge, cannot on that account be placed below the latter as poets; for they have abundantly filled for us vast spaces in the area of poetry which could not have been filled without them. They have ideal treasures not to be found in their contemporaries. What were the early rhapsodists, the story-tellers, ballad-intoners, bards, of an infant people? It is generally conceded that poetry among these is of the purest and freshest. Yet what do they know of our elaborate involutions of phrasemongery? Therefore, especially do I welcome Whitman. In spite of all his faults, he brings us back to the matrix, to common sense and common nature, and makes us feel what poetry originally, what at the root of the matter poetry even now really means, and ought to mean. He is not himself, indeed, always an artist, a poet; but he is often a very great poet; and when he is, he shows himself to be one, because he must be, not because he would like to be, and can mimic those who are. He chants, declaims; *when his soul and subject bid him, he sings*, quite in his own fashion, as the poets of a primitive people do.

After all, it is rarely that you find all poetic gifts perfectly balancing one another in any poet whatever.

Nor can I concede for a moment that deficiency in the region of large vivid insight, affluent imagination, broad human sympathy, or rush and fire of passion, can be more perfectly atoned for by verbal daintiness and skill, or by a fine ear for verbal music, than some defect in these last gifts can be by possession on the part of a poet of those ideal gifts in ampler measure. Indeed, I distinctly believe that the contrary rather is true. There is more hope that a poet may be cured of hesitating utterance than that a mere voluble versifier may sober and strengthen into a poet.

We did want some infusion of robuster and healthier blood among the pallid civilized brotherhood of our poets. If admirers arise who strive to imitate Whitman's gait and form, they will probably make themselves ridiculous, puff themselves out and collapse; yet will he certainly give our jaded literature the prick and fillip that it needed. He at any rate is no closet-warbler, trilling delicately after the music of other singers, having merely a few thin thoughts and emotions only a quarter his own, and a clever aptitude for catching the tricks of another man's manner.

He bears, however, a wonderful resemblance (I often think) to Oriental prophets. He is in manner of life, as well as manner of thought, feeling, temperament, marvelously like a reincarnation over there in the West of that special principle of personality which has been so much more frequently manifested in the East—in Derwishes, for instance, and Sufis. He has so thoroughly assimilated Bible poetry on account of his profound personal identity with the writers of it. Yet is he very un-Hebrew after all. He is more Egyptian, Persian, Indian. Pantheist is he to the backbone; a Nature-worshipper, seeing God everywhere—God in all, even the meanest thing, a God-intoxicated man, more truly than Spinoza, of whom Novalis said it, for Spinoza, whatever else he was, was assuredly never intoxicated. He bows before good and evil as in-

tegral and correlative elements in the universal scheme of things, all going (as Hegel demonstrates) by the principle of identity in contraries. He is a desperate and shameless assertor of the sacredness of the flesh, the body, beauty of form and colour, and the fleshly instincts. This he is (let us freely admit and regret) wantonly, inartistically coarse in asserting; unutterably shocking of course to those who are unutterably shocked with Nature for making us of flesh at all, and who hold that the only way to remedy her immodest mistake is to hush the fact up altogether. And there is a certain want in our author of *moral*, as there is too of *aërial perspective*: all is too much on a level, with the same rather fatiguing, and over-emphasized glare upon it; there are no subtle, reposeful shades, and semitones. The flesh is well, if subordinated, but not if exalted to an equality with the spirit. It is for a handmaid, not for a consort, or a queen. Art, moreover, demands the higher and lower, rule and subordination, light and shadow. But though Whitman is sometimes coarse, he is never prurient.

The passages most capable of giving deep and permanent delight to lovers of poetry in all ages are certainly those in which a profound soul-moving spiritual signification rises without let or hindrance into that perfect rhythmic cadence which is proper to it. Here, doubtless, a careful training of the organ of expression has its place, as well as a fine original instinct for expression, and a genius for grandeur of sound. In proportion to the perfection, or delicate subtlety, magical suggestiveness, and peculiar beauty of cadence, concordant with idea and feeling, will be the penetration, and lingeringly-inherent power of the poem. But the condition implied is that the sound be verily an echo, a reduplication of the sense. In that wonderful music of Coleridge's "Ode to France" there is all the still floating of cloud, the long roll of wave, the solemn music of wind, and swinging pine by night. In "Lewti,"

the delicious, how the mellow ripple of verse in its own "meandering mazes" reflects, and multiplies for ever that gleam of river-swans and river! A marvellous and mysterious fellowship among sights and sounds makes such a marrying of them attainable. Not only is the word *thunder* next of kin to the very reverberating roll in heaven, but very twins also are *blitz*, and the flash that blinds. The name *gleaming* gently soothes the ear, even as soft tender light does the eye. And when the whole subject has a pervading tone, a characteristic movement, be it rapid tumultuous rush, solemn imperial march, pathetic pause, or tripping buoyancy of the dance, then must the true poet's measure breathe antiphonal response in the music. Take Shelley's wonderfully lovely prophetic chorus in "Hellas," or the splendid rhythm of his eagle-chorus in the same; from Byron the stern, sad warrior-lilt of "Isles of Greece;" from Burns the abrupt exulting tramp, the clarion and the battle-shout of "Scots, wha hae."

But in no case can I find that any great poets made poetry to consist in mere ingenious allurements for the ear, busied themselves first of all about this, and let the spiritual fire fall into the midst of their word-altar if it would, or if it could. Alas! how often it will not, though the priests of Ashtaroth cry aloud, and leap, and cut themselves with knives!

Coleridge's "Kubla Khan," exquisite for music, is far too shadowy a vision from opium-land to be permanently remembered, as "Christabel" or the "Mariner" may be. To my mind, that sweetest little bit, called the "Knight's Grave," is, for atmosphere of tender sentiment undefined, yet far-reaching and profound, suffusing picture, thought, and melody alike (surely, the melody is magical to a degree), worth many "Kubla Khans" and similar pieces, arresting only, or almost only from the music of the syllables.

So much I thought it well to premise, because in a day which has seen really beautiful artificial melodies in poetry brought to a pitch of rare perfection, the rough untutored guise of Walt Whitman's muse is likely to prove the most serious obstacle of all to any cardinal justice being done to his high poetic genius.

Yet in Whitman we shall often recognize that nobler kind of harmony which is bound up with a poet's language as a more thorough and effectual expression of thought, image, and feeling. Irregular measures do not make so imperious a demand upon us, putting a pistol to one's ear, with an "Admire me, or your life! See how exquisitely made up I am, and how wonderfully I move!" What a relief to turn from brazen blare of trombone or trumpet, clash and clangour of cymbal, sackbut, psaltery, dulcimer, and all kinds of music to some pastoral pipe of shepherd boy in the hills, some low song of thrush or nightingale in the wood, or gurgle of rills among the summer leaves! Musset, Heine, Burns, Blake, how sweetly they sing! or in "the Land of the Leal," what repose is there!

Turn, first, to this lovely lament for the death of Lincoln, "When lilacs last in the door-yard bloomed:"—

"Down to the shores of the water, the path by the swamp in the dimness,
To the solemn shadowy cedars and ghostly pines so still.

"And the singer so shy to the rest received me,
The gray-brown bird I know received us comrades three,
And he sang what seemed the song of Death, and a verse for him I love.

"Come, lovely and soothing Death!
Undulate round the world, serenely arriving, arriving,
In the day, in the night, to all to each,
Sooner or later, delicate Death!

"Praised be the fathomless universe
For life and joy, and for objects and knowledge curious,
And for love, sweet love. But praise! O praise and praise
For the sure-enwinding arms of cool-enfolding Death!

* * * * *

“ Yet each I keep and all,
 The song, the wondrous chant of the gray-brown bird,
 And the tallying chant, the echo aroused in my soul,
 With the lustrous and drooping star, with the countenance full of woe,
 With the lilac tall, and its blossoms of mastering odour.

“ For the dead I loved so well,
 For the sweetest, wisest soul of all my days and lands . . .
 And this for his dear sake.

Lilac and star and bird twined with the chant of my soul,
 With the holders holding my hand nearing the call of the bird
 There in the fragrant pines and the cedars dusk and dim.”

Note here, too, the creation of a simple, beautiful whole—a few ordinary sights, scents, and sounds, flowing quietly as by accident into the soul, and there taking a solemn tinge from the sublime atmosphere of a manly grief, ready to kindle into the gladness of a triumphant faith—but nothing forced, nothing strained, nothing made up; these messengers from without just taking on an aspect of hallowed sympathy with the tone and temper of the soul they visit. I note this particularly as one instance out of many in Whitman, because what is most noticeable on the surface of him is a certain fragmentariness, a certain tendency to rush rapidly through a whole world of isolated details with an intensity of exhilaration, indeed, which is itself poetic, but which yet fails of compassing the work of art, because there is no organic whole, no sufficiently pervading idea or purpose to impart unity. It is not with him a question of painting a particular scene or even object with extraordinary lovingness and minuteness of touch, the whole being poetical because every touch helps to create, or indeed more strictly develop, a spiritual ideal of scene or thing by flashing upon the bare matter, as it appears to the cold unloving sense, a thousand tints and tones from kindred things with which it has latent fellowship and sympathy. With Whitman rather, in such passages as offend many readers, it is a kind of rapid excited, stride through brilliant, but heterogenous stalls of a great

exhibition or bazaar, cataloguing objects with bare names as he goes.

But still, however barren, or even stammering and inadequate his naming and picturing, he does contrive to flash upon all a wonderful light of freshness, and glory, and triumph in mere existence, as he shoulders along, the great sane man, enjoying, praising, filled to the very brim, in an age of nervous hesitation, question, and lamentation, with a faith as tremendous and unquenchable in the ultimate excellence and right of things as ever burned in prophet or saint of old. A faith not received by inheritance as an heirloom, and conventionally valued as a property, a propriety, a matter of course—but a faith grown out of the very roots and breadths of his own personality, and that the personality of a man who, with all reverence for the past, yet lives in, and assimilates the fresh results yielded by the present, sharing, according to the fuller measure of genius and unwonted human sympathy, the hopes and aspirations of his fellows for the future. His bright and large views of life may indeed be fairly attributed in some measure to his splendid health and physique, as Mr. Rossetti remarks. And I think this rapid, often unsatisfactory, nakedly prosaic cataloguing of innumerable isolated details, may be attributed largely also to the poet's exhilaration in the open air; he can hardly stop to meditate, and get the precise character of the object opened out to him, he enjoys it so, and then so many other things everywhere press themselves on him to be noticed and enjoyed. In this respect, his fellowship with ordinary outdoor, healthy men, his habit of loafing about and basking, does a serious injury to his artistic expression.

For it should be well understood that accuracy of detail may be either naked, cold, and mechanical, or intensely poetic, because thoroughly spiritualized. It is unjust to apply the phrase "*photographic*" to this *last* kind of work. Coleridge and Keats always saw Nature thus: and what I

mean by the poetic vision is a more real and intense, by no means a less true, sight.

But generally Whitman's description appears to me thoroughly masterful. His epithets are few, yet precise and characteristic of the broad general image which a thing, a scene, casts upon a quick, passing, but piercing and sympathetic, observer. Thus :—

“In lower latitudes, in warmer air in the Carolinas, the large black buzzard floating slowly, high beyond the tree-tops ;
Below the red cedar festooned with tylandia ; the pines and cypresses
Growing out of the white sand, that spreads far and flat ;
The waving drapery on the live oak, trailing long and low, noiselessly waved
by the wind.”

But if Whitman be sometimes remarkable for incisive luminous distinctness of vision, and keenness of all sensation, at other times he is no less remarkable for a certain magical, mysterious, half-Oriental, half-German mood that anon possesses him, vague and dim, tender, mournful, mystical.

“The Song of the Broad-axe,” and “Drum-taps” are poems that are almost all organic wholes—exquisite pictures drawn with a few broad telling touches, and exhaling the profoundest pathos, yet seldom morbid—a wind, as of bracing faith, blowing through all the sorrow and the horror ; a bracing atmosphere of personal unselfish heroic endeavour, and most sterling human sympathy pervades them. On the “Drum-taps” Whitman might be content to rest his fame with future generations. There is little philosophy or mysticism ; there are few of those peculiarities in form, or boldnesses of speech which shock people most—the art is certainly more perfect. There is here a definite theme through all the poems—the subject is large, grand, full of energy and strife, one for which Whitman's genius, as well as personal experience, eminently fits him. Have there ever been such a series of war poems written ? I do not know of any. Here, however, not only the tender, loving,

pathetic, as well as realistic and idyllic power of Whitman appears, but also his own ardent personal convictions, tastes, and aspirations, so that ever and anon he breaks into passages of tremendous lyric fire. And, except in that other great poetic figure of the day, Victor Hugo, I hardly know where we shall look in Europe for the like; for our verse does not excel nowadays in *verve*, and fire, and rapid rush.* In that line is not the following magnificent?—

“ Beat ! beat ! drums. Blow ! bugles ! blow !
 Make no parley—stop for no expostulation,
 Mind not the timid, mind not the weeper or prayer,
 Mind not the old man beseeching the young man,
 Let not the child’s voice be heard nor the mother’s entreaties,
Make even the trestles to shake the dead, where they lie awaiting the hearses,
 So strong you thump, O terrible drums; so loud you bugles blow ! ”

And in “The Uprising,” you can hear the surge, and whirl, and shriek of the wind; the tremendous upheaval and welter of the sea; the gathering, overwhelming roar of a roused and maddening multitude; Deep calling unto Deep. Then “The Song of the Banner” is all alive with spirit of battle. In the few lines, “The Flag,” there is a wild, fierce delight, electrically communicated, from the mere arousing of a people *en masse* to fight, it scarcely matters why or for what.

“What we believe in invites no man, promises nothing, sits in calmness and light, is positive and composed, knows no discouragement, waiting patiently, waiting its-time!” That to me is grand; he cannot define, will not pretend to explain precisely, the inevitable and Divine issue of all our strife, and hallowed endeavour, and success, or failure—but It is there, in the Future, in the For ever; patient, silent, great, adorable, inevitably to be.

The short, so perfect, pathetic pictures I spoke of in “Drum-taps” are well worthy of study. “A Letter from

* Since I wrote this, years ago, I have read Mr. Swinburne’s “Songs before Sunrise,” many of which are all alive with resonant lyric fervour inspired by great and sincere human emotions.

Camp," is the simple relation of an affecting incident, without over-elaborate phrase, or prim precision of ornament, after the manner of idyls which become a little wearisome, but has the rare merit, for all its plain speech, of dropping directly into our hearts and remaining there.

"Vigil on the Field" is exquisite for tenderness, sadness, and large, clear delineation of incident and scene. There is a rare freshness of personal feeling about that: the charm of it seems to me unutterable. He watches by a dying comrade whom he loved—a boy—on the field of battle, returns to find him dead, buries him in a blanket in a rude dug grave there. "The Wounded" is another graphic picture. "O tan-faced prairie-boy" and "A Grave" are exquisite little sketches. "Camps of Green," too, is beautiful—the camps of the dead. So is the "Dirge for Two Veterans" and the "Hymn of Dead Soldiers":—

"Sweet are the blooming cheeks of the living, sweet are the musical voices
sounding ;

But sweet, ah ! sweet are the dead, with their silent eyes."

And what shall we say of this, called "Reconciliation" ?—

"Word over all, beautiful as the sky,
Beautiful that war and all its deeds of carnage must in time be utterly lost,
That the hands of the sisters Death and Night incessantly softly wash again,
and ever again this soiled world ;
For my enemy is dead—a man divine as myself is dead.
I look where he lies, white-faced and still, in the coffin ; I draw near,
I bend down, and touch lightly with my lips the white face in the coffin."

Or of this ?—He walks out in the dim gray daybreak, and sees three forms on stretchers, covered with gray heavy blankets. "Curious I halt, and silent stand"—then he lifts one blanket :—

"Who are you, elderly man, so gaunt and grim, with well-grayed hair, and
flesh all sunken about the eyes? Who are you, my dear comrade?
Then to the second I step—and who are you, my child and darling? Who
are you, sweet boy with cheeks yet blooming?
Then to the third—a face nor child nor old, very calm, as of beautiful
yellow-white ivory,

Young man, I think I know you. I think this face of yours is the face of
the Christ himself;
Dead and divine and brother of all, and here again he lies."

I would now, before passing to consider shortly the general character of Whitman's philosophy and teaching, draw closer attention to the nature of his music. I take another instance from the poem, "When lilacs last in the door-yard bloomed :"—

"O how shall I warble myself for the dead one there I loved?
And how shall I deck my song for the large sweet soul that has gone?
And what shall my perfume be for the grave of him I love?"

"Seawinds blown from east and west,
Blown from the eastern sea, and blown from the western sea, till there on
the prairies meeting :
These, and with these and the breath of my chant,
I perfume the grave of him I love.

"O what shall I hang on the chamber walls?
And what shall the pictures be that I hang on the walls,
To adorn the burial-house of him I love?"

But of all our author's poems, surely the loveliest is "A Song out of the Sea." I only wish I could quote it whole, but it is too long. I hesitate not to say that to me there is no lyric in the language like it—out of Shelley.

There is a wonderful natural music running through this and similar poems of Whitman's; an outbreathing as in primitive times, and among a primitive people, that can come from nowhere but from the very depths of a poet's, a singer's soul. It is all his own—creation of spirit, body, vesture. He is intensely original; has not been imbued with the world's rich inheritance of treasured poetry; works under no strong (however flexible) traditions of art, speaks because he must, sings because he must; yet, with all his rare personal mass and intensity, sings only sometimes—would certainly sing more constantly did he condescend to condense and concentrate more; in which some respect for established forms would largely assist him. And yet in the links of poems, where there is confessedly no intensity

of fire possible, if at least we require that it shall be germane to the subject, it is more than doubtful whether the desert spaces should be scattered over with sham flowers instead of real ones ; as the established practice, or at least the standard poetry by which the present generation judges, appears to require. So you get either fine sound with no meaning whatever, or epithets ingeniously constructed in cold blood, which in either case seriously interferes with the natural and life-like development of the poem. Pure honest prose, where prose is really proper, would be infinitely better.

However all this be, here, in the "Song of the Sea," and in similar passages from Whitman, you do assuredly find, if you are sensitive and competent, a certain artless harmony of sound that flows like a spell upon jaded ears, somewhat sated with cloying artificial harmonies from the study. One is reminded of some dreamy nocturne, or slumbrous mystic voluntary breathed in twilight within a vast cathedral, or weird natural sounds we know not whence, wandering phantasmal over lowland wildernesses by night.

In "A Song out of the Sea," the strain is like the very voice of Ocean himself ; thereinto has passed the very plaint and murmur of winds over barren sand and briny briar ; rising alternately and falling ; harsh, interrupted, disturbed ; caught up unaware, smooth, and soothing ; stealing upon us forlorn and melodious, from unfooted wastes, and shadowy realms of some spirit land that is very far.

Just two personification-pictures, eminently rich in colour, firm in outline, distinct and pregnant with symbol, yet small in compass and condensed. One is from "Old Ireland :"—

" Far hence amid an isle of wondrous beauty,
Crouching over a grave, an ancient sorrowful mother,
Once a queen, now lean and tattered, seated on the ground ;

Her old white hair drooping dishevelled round her shoulders
 At her feet an unused royal harp,
 Long silent—she too long silent—mourning her shrouded hope and heir :
 Of all the earth her heart most full of sorrow, because most full of love.”

The other is from “A Broadway Pageant,” written on occasion of the reception of a Japanese embassy :—

“ The Originatress comes,
 The land of Paradise—land of the Caucasus—the nest of birth,
 The nest of languages, the bequeather of poems, the race of Eld,
 Florid with blood, pensive, rapt with musings, hot with passion,
 Sultry with perfume, with ample and flowing garments,
 With sunburnt visage, with intense soul and glittering eyes,
 The race of Brahma comes !”

We will now consider briefly Walt Whitman's position as prophet and teacher.

Of the very extraordinary and powerful poem called “Walt Whitman” Mr. Buchanan says : “Whitman is here for the time being, and for poetical purposes, the cosmical man, an entity, a representative of the great forces.” And here he expresses with immense power the infinite culminating worth of personality—how all natural influences have been, and are ever working up to constitute and develop a man, a woman, a person. It is the broad dignity of a man, as a man, he preaches ; very little the special privileges of distinguished men, or favoured classes of men. This is the very spirit and truth of democracy :—

“ Rise after rise bow the phantoms behind me ;
 Afar down I see the first huge nothing—I know I was even then ;

“ I waited unseen and always, and slept through the lethargic mist,
 And took my time, and took no hurt from the fetid carbon.

“ Immense have been the preparations for me,
 Faithful and friendly the arms that have helped me ;

“ Cycles ferried my cradle, rowing and rowing like cheerful boatmen ;

“ For room to me, stars kept aside in their own rings,
 They sent influences to look after what was to hold me ;
 Before I was born out of my mother generations guided me ;
 My embryo has never been torpid—nothing could overlay it ;

“For it the nebula cohered to an orb,
The long slow strata piled to rest it on,
Vast vegetables gave it sustenance,
Monstrous sauroids transported it in their mouths and deposited it with
care ;

“All forces have been steadily employed to complete and delight me ;
Now on this spot I stand with my robust soul.”

In a poem of extraordinary vigour, though one of those where he puts down innumerable items—yet here for a great and distinct pervading purpose—“*Salut au Monde*,” after passing in rapid review, and addressing with graphic characteristic epithet or two almost all conceivable inhabitants of the globe—great, refined, small, vulgar, bad, good—he says :—

“Each of us inevitable,
Each of us limitless, each of us with his or her right upon the earth ;

“Each of us allowed the eternal purports of the earth,
Each of us here as divinely as any is here.

“My spirit has passed in compassion and determination around the whole
earth ;
I have looked for equals and lovers, and found them ready for me in all
lands.”

And, in “*Starting from Paumanok*,” he says :—

“Creeds and schools in abeyance,
I harbour for good or bad—I permit to speak at every hazard—
Nature now without check, with primal energy . . .
. . . And sexual organs and acts ! do you concentrate in me ;
For I am determined to tell you with courageous clear voice, to prove you
illustrious . . .”

This last determination he carries out in a series of poems (not reprinted by Mr. Rossetti) called “*Children of Adam*.” Again he resolves :—

“I will sing the song of companionship,
I will write the evangel poem of comrades and love,
For who but I should understand love, with all its sorrow and joy,
And who but I should be the poet of comrades ?”

And this he does (as I think most nobly, and with real originality) in a series called “*Calamus*.” Some of these,

under a different heading, Mr. Rossetti reproduces. Thus we have "The Friend," "Meeting Again," "Parting Friends," "Envy," "The City of Friends," "The Love of Comrades:"—

"Come, I will make the continent indissoluble ;
I will make the most splendid race the sun ever yet shone upon !
I will make divine magnetic lands
With the love of comrades,
With the life-long love of comrades.

"I will plant companionship thick as trees along all the rivers of America,
and along the shores of the great lakes, and all over the prairies ;
I will make inseparable cities, with their arms about each other's necks,
By the love of comrades,
By the manly love of comrades."

"Fit Audience" is another of these, and the charming "Singing in Spring." One is called "Out of the Crowd :"—

"Out of the rolling ocean, the crowd, came a drop gently to me,
Whispering *I love you ; before long I die !*
I have travelled a long way merely to look on you, to touch you,
For I could not die till I once looked on you,
For I feared I might afterward lose you.

"Now we have met, we have looked, we are safe,
Return in peace to the ocean, my love ;
I too am part of the ocean, my love ;
Behold the great rondure—the cohesion of all, how perfect !"

Many will admire this ideal of manly friendship—warm, faithful, founded in mutual love as well as mutual esteem—and will believe with him, that if there were more of it, States and peoples would be nobler and stronger. Of course it must be regulated, as intercourse with the opposite sex also, by moderation, good taste, and, above all, mutual reverence. But I think many Pagan ideas need reincorporation in our ideal, only with a difference, sublimated ; they have been rightly dropped for a time, to be resumed later ; yet even the higher Greeks, such as Socrates, deprecated excess.

Atomism, solitary, self-supporting, self-seeking, competing, contending isolation—each for himself—such is our ideal ; our ideal in private life, as well as in political

economy. It is not the ideal of Christianity, as understood by Christ and His disciples, or the early Church. But—

“John P.
Robinson, he
Sez they didn't know everything down in Judee.”

And the most orthodox Christians now, though ready to roast any honest person who says it, seem practically very much to agree with him. One's wife and children, indeed, as part of one's family, as belonging to one's self; and sometimes even a poor relation, as coming within the enchanted circle—these may be regared (in a married man's case) as one or two satellites revolving round that great centre of an Englishman's solar system—himself.

“To Working Men” is a very characteristic poem. The great catholic, all-yearning heart of the man who shrinks from no one, however deceived and degraded; who longs to take each and all into his fraternal heart, solace and succour, and bring him nearer, not to his, the lover's, individual standard, but to the beloved person's own ideal idiosyncrasy—comes out finely here. Does it not breathe the very spirit of Christ?—

“If you become degraded, criminal, ill, then I become so for your sake;
If you remember your foolish and outlawed deeds, do you think I
Cannot remember my own foolish and outlawed deeds?
If you carouse at the table, I carouse at the opposite side of the table.”

Then he continues to expound his central conviction of the supreme worth of manhood—personality:—

“We consider Bibles and religions divine—I do not say they are not divine;
I say that they have all grown out of you, and may grow out of you still;
It is not they who give the life, it is you who give the life.

“Leaves are not more shed from the trees, or trees from the earth, then they
are shed out of you.

. . . The sum of all known reverence I add up in you, whoever you are,
The President is there in the White House for you; it is not you who are
here for him.

* * * * * * *

- “ All doctrines, all politics, civilizations exurge from you ;
If you were not breathing and walking here, where would they all be ?
The most renowned poems would be ashes, orations, and plays would be vacuums.
- “ All architecture is what you do to it when you look upon it ;
All music is what awakes from you when you are reminded by the instruments.”

If we seek for some one to lament over his age, how base, how lethargic, how vulgar and prosaic it is, and how no one can possibly get the materials of poetry out of it, evidently we must not go to Walt Whitman. If we have not great poetry, he would probably ascribe it, not to the fault of the age, but to that of the versemongers who despise and despair of it. There are low and grovelling and un-beautiful tendencies enough, God knows ; but we need men to see what is good and great in us, and to urge us on to nobler and richer life—hardly to stand by and curse us unhelpfully, as Shimei did David. And though it is quite true that Whitman is not an artist primarily—he is too indifferent in shaping beautiful works of art out of his rich materials ; he does not care for art at all for art's sake—yet he does abundantly prove the *spirit* in which a poet may look even at this present age, and lift it up into the regions of art, if he only will. Faith, Hope, need not be extinct among us ; there is a Future ; let us help to shape it. Whitman intimates that he looks to a wider, fuller life for all men, for average men and average women ; when love and justice shall prevail, and yet individualities shall be allowed fuller play ; when each shall be revered and respected for what he is, his place in the harmonious community admitted ; a richer community, made up from many types of person ; when the dignity of flesh and its impulses shall be acknowledged, under due restraint from those principles which are yet higher in our nature—as, for instance, the sympathetic principle ; when men shall reverence one another for what they are—not on delusive, artificial grounds, that afford no true reason for reverence,

but serve only to confuse our truer instincts of veneration, to render us superstitious and idolatrous.

Robert Buchanan among Englishmen has produced some noble poetry out of these same unpromising materials, though high life below stairs, and gentlemen's gentlemen, or urban and courtly persons may shudder at it as vulgar. And since Pope produced poems unsurpassable of their kind out of the analytic, and critical tendencies of his time, more unpromising than any, who shall pronounce, *à priori*, that Clough, and Arnold must fail because *they* try to draw music from the mingled forebodings, foreshadowings, hopes, despairs, and speculations of our own? Surely this wondrous, mysterious twilight over a world that has fissures opening into Hell, and vistas that invite to Heaven, surely this twilight may have music of its own—music that shall be no frigid imitation of one that is no more.

Nothing, of course, can be easier than to say certain subjects are unpoetical, unfit for art. Railroads are, manufactures are, mysticism of any kind and philosophy— anxious questionings, wonderings, tremulous fears and hopes—these are. For they are not in Homer, or Pope, or Herrick, or some one else. I say it depends entirely on how they are touched, in what *spirit* they are taken up and treated, whether they are poetical or not; that we must judge honestly by poetical results, not judge the works given forth by preconceived theories, and mere private idiosyncrasies; not even by the *ipse dixits* of a fraternity of critics; all that passes—good work remains, and another generation acknowledges it to be good. There is a *valet* way of looking at *every* present epoch; only the old poets and prophets had a way of their own. Men and women still live and love, and toil and suffer. Explorers and pioneers open up new continents, bring the people of to-day face to face with wonderful races of the past, isolated yet alive, or mummied in their tombs; vast human problems press for solution; science enlarges her kingdom, and opens

out new worlds to imagination: Nature is eternal around us: and while we wait expectant, as yet uncertain by what Word the eruptive forces we hear rumbling, as they gather anew deep down in the very depths of our humanity, shall become articulate in human language, we can turn to Her, ever undisturbed, ever young, ever calm, and read in Her countenance inexhaustible meanings by the glimmers of light shed ever freshly upon her out of restless, ever-complicating labyrinths of our own human spirits. Enough if there be among us an undercurrent of sterling life—a thankfulness for victories achieved, a looking for victories to come, a keen relish for life as it is, or a strong desire to make it nobler.

Now look a moment at the poem "Whosoever." Perhaps none serves to bring out Whitman's central doctrine of all personal worth so thoroughly as this:—

- "None but would subordinate you—I only am he who will never consent to subordinate you ;
 I only am he who places over you no master, owner, better, god, beyond what waits intrinsically in yourself.
 Painters have painted their swarming groups, and the centre figure of all ;
 From the head of the centre figure spreading a nimbus of gold-coloured light.
 But I paint myriads of heads ; but paint no head without its nimbus of gold-coloured light.
 . . . The mockeries are not you.
 Underneath them and within them I see you lurk ;
 I pursue you where none else has pursued you.
 . . . The shaved face, the unsteady eye, the impure complexion, if these baulk others they do not baulk me.
 . . . There is no virtue, no beauty, in man or woman, but as good is in you ;
 No pleasure waiting for others, but an equal pleasure waits for you.
 . . . I sing the songs of the glory of none—not God—sooner than I sing the songs of the glory of you.
 Whoever you are, claim your own at any hazard !"

All this is very striking, and is a vigorous proclamation of a fundamental truth, of *the* great truth which the time is beginning to see more and more clearly. Yet in this, as in the preceding passages quoted to illustrate Whitman's teaching on this score, there is (as is wont to be the case in the pro-

clamations of most prophets), a certain one-sidedness, exaggeration, looseness of thought. When he says above that all doctrines, politics, civilization, sculpture, poems, histories, "exurge from *you*" (the average man, any man), the truth underlying this is that all these come out of human nature—out of individuals, indeed, but out of individuals who could not have existed as they were without the help of all previous human and other history, without the moulding of their age, as of the average men and women from whom they spring, and who take their part in educating these more distinguished spirits. These last are the mouthpieces of their time, and help to mould the future man, even the present average man. But his nature, too, has a root identity with theirs, has germs and rudiments of the same faculties; and the life of all great works derives continuous vitality from kindred spirits who comprehend them, while kindred creations are roused through the contemplation of them. Now Whitman thus proclaims that men are "of one blood," are kindred amid all their differences; so that a man, any man, may claim fellowship with the best and mightiest of his race, may therefore enfold within himself the principles of sublimest heroic and intellectual manhood; is anyhow and at worst a person with personal rights in a higher sense than any other creatures are, and may claim from all his fellows to be acknowledged and revered as such; from his society, and all functionaries of his society (however powerful and dignified), may claim such possible facilities as shall enable him to make the best of himself and his special capabilities. Though, indeed, one would have fancied that something of this kind was precisely what our Lord Jesus Christ had proclaimed with some force more than one thousand eight hundred years ago. Only such truths take a good deal of proclaiming. His followers did not quite like them, and thought it, on the whole, for the advantage of the brute mass (and of themselves), if they could make out that He had in fact

proclaimed precisely the opposite of such truths. They need, therefore, reasserting, and in a modern fashion. But the big people, and the good people will not like them any better. What a chorus of pious horror, when some one said that Christ was the first Socialist! Yet for all that *magna est veritas et prævalebit*.

Notwithstanding, I do think, when we are making a study of these doctrines, we ought to point out where they seem to need considerable guarding and qualification.

Men are not individual only, but members of a community, of a body politic. And Whitman accordingly would supplement this bold, uncompromising assertion of individual dignity by the inculcation of love, of the most ardent and self-sacrificing spirit of fraternity. "Liberty, equality, fraternity." Here again he is Christian enough. But is equality a truth in the manner in which he asserts it? I believe not; and if not, it must be so far mischievous to assert it. That common manhood is a greater, more cardinal fact than any distinctions among men which raise one above another I most firmly believe. Still these distinctions do exist, and so palpable a fact cannot be ignored without very serious injury. If great men could not have been without average men, and owe most to the grand aggregate soul of the ideal unit, humanity—which is a pregnant truth—yet, on the other hand, this grand aggregate soul could never have been what it is, could never have been enriched with the treasures it now enjoys, without those most personal of all personalities—prophets, heroes, men of genius. Out of the unknown, invisible, mystic sphere they issue, revelations, incommensurable, incalculable, unforeseen, bringers of new germinal life, like those imagined meteoric stones of the philosopher, or the Divine Spirit that brooded upon the face of primæval waters. If these men need to be reminded, as they do, of the rock whence they are hewn, there is yet a danger of average men mistaking such a message as that of modern democracy through so powerful

a spokesman as Whitman, and insisting upon paring down the ideal superiority of their great ones too much to the level of their own inorganic uniformity, rather than acknowledging and venerating what is verily superior in these; taking them for leaders in regions where they are appointed by Nature to lead, and generally aiming to raise themselves so far as possible to the standard of a higher excellence thus set before them.

In order to satisfy this law of *inequality* among men, I do not believe that the mere proclamation of friendly love as between comrades (any more than of sexual love and equal union between man and woman) is at all sufficient. Veneration, reverence, also must be proclaimed, as likewise necessary; and the great point we ought to aim at, in helping to solve the momentous question of the social future, seems in that respect to be this—that mankind be taught, and gradually accustomed, to place their reverence where reverence is indeed due, and not upon mere idols of popular superstition. It is said (and, alas! with some truth) that if you tear people from before one false shrine, they may only grovel before a baser. But I say this should be *the end* kept steadily in view—to stir up that which is noblest in ourselves, in order that we may be able to venerate what is most venerable in others, and may ourselves be raised more near to their standard. That every man, *whatever he be now*, is to be supremely satisfied with himself as he is now, is of course not in the least what Whitman means; but there is a danger of his sometimes vague and unguarded language being so understood by the natural average man, who is already well disposed to be satisfied with his lower habitual self, and make *himself* the measure of the standard to which the Universe on the whole will do well to conform. This may too readily result in the tyranny of a blind and prejudiced and ignorant majority; by no means selecting men in any department of the State, or of private occupations for their special fitness to guide and

govern in such particular positions, and to introduce a higher ideal of life or of work, but rather jealous, hostile, or indifferent to these, basely suspicious and envious of their higher manly worth, their larger knowledge, and their vaster power. We *must worship something*; and what we most tend to worship is any larger and more successful incarnation of our meaner, less noble selves. The average Briton, for instance, and, it is credibly reported, the average American also, have a sort of self-complacent air about them, as if they were quite sure, not only that the Deity is like an average Anglo-Saxon, but even that He ought to feel very thankful for it. Utter individual freedom and self-assertion, unbalanced by any counterbalancing principle of deference, humility, and reverence, has far too much tendency to resolve itself into this, which just makes real progress impossible, and might throw humanity far back awhile, even in the very midst of democracy, and perfect political freedom. But what Whitman does see so clearly is that, even when men have themselves elected a ruler, or been concerned in the choice of a form of government, there is a sort of glamour of the imagination which immediately invests any actual depositary of power, and bows them in a kind of unreasonable stupor before it. He therefore reminds them—Government exists for you, not you for government. Obey it intelligently; modify it when reason requires.

Wealth, honour, and rank have the same way of casting a glamour over the imagination, so that men do not concern themselves with inquiring what the source of such wealth may be, or how far wealth and rank may involve personal qualities which are, indeed, worthy of some reverence. But we are apt to be enslaved by the accomplished fact, because we have not been educated to enshrine a true God in the place of these usurpers—usurpers, that is, if they assume the highest place, as they so generally do.

It behoves, therefore, to look a little closer at such

broad statements as those we have quoted from Whitman. Architecture, sculpture, religions, *are a great deal more* than what the average man does to them when he thinks about them. They were much more in the creative genius of those who invented them, or at least gave the final and complete form they took. And as to their being ashes and vacuums now but for the average man, this is far more than any one may presume to say. They are in God; and, moreover, they are the eternal inheritance of those who created them: in them they are for ever. There may be some persons who do comprehend them nearly as they were—one or two even may cause them to take on now a profounder, and more general significance than they wore of old, though they are never again precisely the living, foremost bloom, or foam-flower, of the moving World-spirit, which they were then. But, at any rate, their significance must be quite infinite, and in proportion, moreover, to the place that they then filled in the history of the world. The pulsations that they caused may no longer be visible in the shape of circling waves, but their effect can never cease. That is a law in physics, and shall it be less a law in the higher spiritual sphere? Assuredly not. It is well to remind men that they may enter into all these things if they will claim their privileges; still it will be well to remember also that every man does not, will not, and this verily because he cannot, enter into them. It is, after all, and ever will be, the privilege of some. *Each has his function*, each is excellent, viewed from a higher standpoint; even the cruel and the base are. But certainly we must not suppose that we can all have the same place, and fill equally well the functions of everybody else. Such a principle can only lead to endless confusion and mistake. Rather does the true principle of human dignity consist in learning and acknowledging the worth and necessity of every function, so that no one shall henceforth be ashamed of his post, however humble, and that no one shall foolishly

look down upon him for filling it—look down on him only if he refuse to fill it, or fill it unworthily and carelessly. Society must see to it, indeed, that each man at his post be regarded as man, his other human claims not being disregarded. But his position as worker in any capacity is to be esteemed honourable; nor need everybody be in such a desperate hurry to become something which he is not, and which all assuredly cannot be, to the detriment and ill-being of those who do not succeed in this general scramble for pelf and consideration, but remain, as they must, a vast majority of condemned pariahs on the lower rungs of the social ladder. To wear a black coat, and win the inestimable privilege of making one's workmen fight as fiercely with one's self for bread as one fought with one's own master before!—that is what political economy says we must all make haste and do. In such a light, this unguarded proclamation of the absolute equality of man appears to be somewhat doubtful and confounding. An ideal social scheme would rather consist in every man claiming his own, and acknowledging the special aptitudes of his neighbour. Yet I think that Whitman is valuable precisely on this account, that he corrects the prevalent tendency of advanced thought to rely on more or less questionable social Utopias, leaving the nature of individuals unchanged; teaching that each is honourable in his own position and calling. Nevertheless, some external circumstances and callings are intolerable, and degrading to manhood; wherefore social obstructions do need removal. On the other hand, Whitman is defective in not granting more unreservedly the need of spiritual regeneration, and of that heavenlier Civil Constitution, or City of God, which the noblest have ever anticipated and aspired to as slow and sure consummation of such regeneration, social and individual. There is danger in too unreservedly preaching the body, moreover, lest the cruel anarchy, and dire confusion of those kingdoms of fair glamour and sweet illusion prevail

over that of organized human order, and all our realm "reel back into the beast." But "God fulfils himself in many ways." How noble is the picture of Whitman himself in his honourable poverty, and old age of lonely suffering, as presented to us in the glowing pages, recently published, of Dr. Bucke! still cheerful, uncomplaining, beautifully patient, a lovelier spectacle even than in the prime of magnificent manhood. Perhaps this Walt Whitman may be so morally well-knit, and sweet-natured that he may not need that repentance and renewal, which the Tannhäusers amongst us, and the average men, do so sadly, and unquestionably require.

But it is fair to admit that Whitman does now and then distinctly acknowledge the claims of greatness to lead mankind, insisting on the supreme worth of ideal manhood, strong mastering personality; and these passages are to be set against the others. In the "Song of the Broad Axe" he does this finely. And nothing can be finer or more complete than his description of an ideal great city or state. In it he goes dead against the too prevalent worship of material resources and material power. It is where the most virtuous, most loving, most independent citizens are; where we find the fullest life of intellect, heart, and soul; where the happiness and good of each stands sacred and secure, so far as the community can secure it.

From a poem called "Greatnesses" we may quote—

"Great is Justice!

Justice is not settled by legislators and laws—it is in the soul;
It cannot be varied by statutes, any more than love, pride, gravity;
It is *immutable*—it does *not depend on majorities*—majorities or
What not come at last before the same passionless and exact tribunal."

So that we see the truth is, Whitman believes the ideal manhood to be whole in each man, only waiting, hidden in some; he calls men up to this, out of their baser everyday selves. In this again, he does not surely differ much from the loftiest Christian teaching. Only while

Whitman says that the ideal is in every man, Christian teachers more platonically assert rather that every individual is in the ideal Man. Is that a difference between tweedledum and tweedledee? Not altogether, perhaps, because it does make a difference whether we are to look *into ourselves, and ourselves only*, for spiritual elevation above the ordinary, or whether we are to look *out of ourselves* to a possible Source of higher manhood, which yet at present is by no means manifest in us.

One more word. Whitman not obscurely intimates more than once that he believes in personal immortality, though that conviction comes out with even more solemn force in the prose "Democratic Vistas."

In "Nearing Departure" he says:—

"A dread beyond, of I know not what, darkens me.
O book and chant! must all then amount to but this?
And yet it is enough, O Soul!
O soul! we *have positively appeared—that is enough.*"

In "Wherefore," too, he says, yielding for awhile to sadness, doubt, despondency, about the poor results achieved through incessant, apparently useless struggle:—

"What good amid these, O me, O life?"

Then he answers:—

"That *you are here, that life exists, and identity,*
That the *powerful play goes on and you will contribute a verse.*"

Such, indeed, is that of which at least we are certain. The least may know that the eternities centre in him. Now, he is—they could not possibly be without him, even as he is—and they diverge from him again; a seed is he of all Divine futurity. Surely, this is something to know; while we may make our lives a conscious contribution, after our measure, to the sacred cause of humanity, we may live out of the bounds of our own little selves, and so inherit the ages. But in truth none can cease to be; for the essence of each individual is eternal in God.

Again, in a wonderful little bit, "To one shortly to Die," he sings :—

"The sun bursts through in unlooked-for directions ;
 Strong thoughts fill you, and confidence—you smile !
 You forget you are sick, as I forget you are sick ;
 You do not see the medicines—you do not mind the weeping friends—I am
 with you,
*I exclude others from you—there is nothing to be commiserated ;
 I do not commiserate—I congratulate you.*"

Again, elsewhere, he says :—

"You are henceforth secure whatever comes and goes."

And why? Surely any one may say it.

In Mr. Lincoln's Funeral Hymn, Whitman sings :—

"Blossoms and branches green to coffins all I bring,
 For fresh as the morning—thus would I chant a song for you,
 O SANE AND SACRED DEATH."

I suppose what will shock the majority most is Whitman's admitting evil and misfortune as part of the necessary order, entering as integral elements into the *Square Deific*. Wherein he follows the small shoemaker, and great philosopher, Jacob Behmen. Yet, after all that has been said about it, thus it is. And "if it be so, so it is, you know." Evil affords, as imperfection, the necessary stepping-stone to spiritual and moral progress; affords the opposition necessary to call out goodness, wisdom, love, patient virtuous strife, and ultimate victory. All goes in this universe by a play of contraries, or where would be the life, advance, conquest, the infinite and harmonious variety?

Without Satan, where would be the Saviour?

Still one does feel that Walt Whitman virtually throws men and women, as they seem to themselves and others now, in their passing appearance, and usually unbeautiful life on earth, as well as all the crude and isolated phenomena of external Nature, boldly, so to speak, into the absolute, affirming their equal excellence and perfection even from such a standpoint. That certainly is not right;

the real, in its momentary manifestation, is often ugly, defective, evil, not ideal at all, and only ideal in its gradual, slow, final efflorescence or development, as it will be, not as it is. Hence a certain confusion, a want of proportion and perspective, jarring to the spiritual, moral, and reasonable, as well as to the æsthetic, and artistic in us. It is chaotic and confounding thus to gather good and bad men, strong and weak men, under one common blessing. I like a good hater. Some acts, and some characters—the cruel and tyrannous for instance—ought to rouse a wholesome and healthy indignation. Only so do abuses get reformed, and wrongs redressed; only so does society advance; and yet, who is it that sends His rain on the just and unjust? Besides, after all, this poet has an ideal of what men and women ought to be—a great and comprehensive and fresh one, that includes the body. And he *can* with strong, pungent eloquence, denounce what he thinks wicked, false, mean, injurious.*

* Especially in his later writings does he express full sorrowful recognition and bitter burning denunciation of what is base, degrading, corrupt in the great American Commonwealth, as in private persons. Particularly notable is that in his noble prose manifesto, "Democratic Vistas," where he insists also in fine vigorous English upon the pre-eminence of the spiritual and moral in human nature. Grand here is his proclamation of idealism, in which what seems real has but a relative (though indeed a very serviceable and admirable) validity (on p. 66 of the author's own edition of his works, 1876, a copy of which he gave me). I grant that this view has become more prominent with maturity and illness, as is natural. Again what graphic scenes, beheld by keen sympathetic human eyes, and written down as with red blood from a great human heart, in "Memoranda during the War!" But ordinary critics, like flies (doubtless under supreme direction of some editorial Beelzebub, lord of flies!), so very much prefer sore and galled places to sound and healthy, remain so singularly unaware of the latter, display so marked a predilection (can it be, after all, I wonder, from some secret affinity?) for settling upon the former, though professing, indeed, only a virtuous and consuming zeal for literary purification. Yet to the pure all things are pure—at least, they pass over, as little concerning them, what is poor and what is ugly, being attracted rather, in a spirit of catholic generosity, by those qualities that have personal flavour, and originality, that contribute to richer and fuller life, or fresh and subtle discernment. Whatsoever things are true, beautiful, and noble, they love to think on these things. But there is, of course, a certain pleasure felt by some little

Whitman's own humanity, his kindly insight, is so rich, so deep, so all-embracing, that he sees and feels a sacred significance in the very worst and lowest, divines the god in the worm, a latent and potentially healthy, beautiful hero in some poor, vile, degraded leper, a noble statue in the rough stone ; and do not the saints also do that ? Did not Christ ? All is good to him because he sees the whole in the part, the future in the present, the eternal in the temporary : all to him is transfigured in the light of love. As an excellent critic has said, even repulsive, sordid, or common elements in the beloved are lovely or very tolerable to a lover ; body as well as soul, too, he loves. Now Whitman is a lover of all men and women, not of abstract humanity only ; and so, even evil, suffering, and depravity appear necessary to their full development. The macrocosm is indeed in the microcosm ; if one could only discern it, how happy would this make us !

But the special note of Whitman is that he introduces the Bacchic, dithyrambic, unconventional, enthusiastic strain

minds in "cheeking," tormenting, or patronizing their superiors. And then it takes a measure of greatness to recognize greatness. The little natures perhaps honestly regard themselves as superiors of the greater nature they love to bespatter, simply because they are able to find, or else to fancy many faults in it. That is a complete mistake ; but a common, and perhaps a natural one. It would in fact not be difficult to be greater than a mere spasm, or grimace of virtuous disgust ! And yet the conspiracy of silence by which it is hoped that the vital air of sympathy, almost necessary to the breath of art, may be withheld from her, and so another voice of song be silenced, that is almost more disgraceful even than dull, malignant, or smart, facetious abuse. Only, providentially, genius has bread to eat that these know not of, though no mortal man may have brought it anything at all. And as for popularity, one thinks of what the cynical orator said to a friend when the mob cheered him vociferously : "Have I, then, said anything so very foolish ?" But in the end, wisdom is justified of her children. And since such is the rule in the world's dealing with genius, it must be well for all concerned that it should be so.

"Fame is no plant that grows on mortal soil,
Nor in the glistering foil
Set off to the world, nor in broad rumour lies,
But lives and spreads aloft by those pure eyes,
And perfect witness of all-judging Jove."

into modern poetry. For all his egotism, he is extraordinarily possessed, carried out of self into Nature, the joyous, immoral, reckless, palpitating nature of fawn, satyr, nymph, and primæval animal-innocence; only that Corybantic mood is tinged with a mystical tone; wine and appetite and bodily strength are sacramental, imply the possibility of other and profounder fervours, of more seraphic ardours, as they are to the Oriental poets, Saadi, and Hafiz, and Omar Khayam. *What* spiritual kingdom shall absorb and render us captive when we surrender ourselves, and cease to will? It may be the dark kingdom, or the light. Therefore, let self-control lie hidden somewhere in the background. "Im ganzen, guten, Schönen resolut zu leben," was Goethe's motto. But in Whitman there is none of the cold, hard glitter, fair, modulated, subtle, reasonable, self-seeking grace of indifference to other claims in the pursuit of pleasure, characteristic of Greece; still less of deliberate resolve to sacrifice every splendid, irrational, Quixotic, or affectionate impulse to life-long self-culture, which is the note of Goethe. Nay, but we find in him an abundant measure of the Christ-spirit, pouring itself abroad with a cheerful spontaneity, because it must flow over every human, or other creature who needs him, holding nothing for common or unclean. The suffering and dying, with filmy eye and faltering lip, bless Walt, and entreat him to return soon, not more for the womanly tenderness of his nursing and cherishing touch, than for the healing magnetism of human strength and sympathy that goes forth from him. Here is a cosmopolitan, who is yet a patriot; a childlike gentleness that seeks, and is sought by little children; a rich, well-knit, and balanced humanity, with no curst inheritance of vengeful, sour, rancorous, proud, man-severing blood. In the words of Abraham Lincoln, a soul equally simple and genuine, "Well, he looks like a man!"

I conclude with some weighty sentences from the venerable bard himself. "Great is emotional love. But if we

must make gradations, I am clear that there is something greater." "Noiseless, with flowing steps, the lord, the sun, the last Ideal comes. By the names Right, Justice, Truth, we suggest, but do not describe it. To the world of men it remains a dream. But no dream is it to the wise—but the proudest, almost only solid, lasting thing of all."

RAMBLES BY CORNISH SEAS.

WHEN I wrote this, Cornwall was a new land to me. Since, I have come to love it well, and know it better, visiting Tintagel, as well as the magnificent cliff scenery near New Quay, and Bedruthen, exploring caverns and blow-holes innumerable. My delight in what I saw could hardly have been greater had Cornwall been a hitherto unvisited country. I was, in fact, not more happy when Mr. Cyril Graham and I, first of Europeans, we believe, reached the oasis of Kurkur, in the Libyan desert, or when Jaun and I crossed the Renfer Joch, after climbing the Engelhörner, above Rosenloui; at my first glimpse of Palmyra in the desert, or swimming in the Gouliot caves of Sark.

Porthcurnow was my head-quarters for a few days, where there is, or was, a comfortable little lodging-house, kept by Mr. and Mrs. Roberts, particularly agreeable people. You cannot do better than stay either here or at Porthgarra, the neighbouring fishing village, where there is also accommodation of the same kind. Before the weather broke up a friend and I walked from the little inn on the Land's End, where we had slept, to Porthcurnow, on a fine, calm day. The evening before, after wandering about at the Land's End, I lay out under shelter of a rock as the sun sank over the sea. Wild, now rarely blossoming, thrift in clefts of granite sang in the breeze; there was a fringe of foam, as ever, round that fantastic and splendid granite

pile, a short distance from land, which is called the "Armed Knight," a natural fortress, with wave-ruined buttress, pinnacle, and spire. The sun was immediately behind the great Longships Lighthouse, more than a mile from shore, throwing it into deep black shadow, making a long path of light upon the grey water; then, westward travelling, he left the lighthouse visible, sinking, slowly crimsoning, into the wave.

Later, the stars came forth in all their glory, the orange moon having risen; but soon she passed under a cloud, and sank again below the sea. But while the constellations journeyed over, Ocean's grand voice sounding ever in my ears, infinitely restless beyond dark headlands, what a sense of the wonder, and yet nothingness of man was borne in upon me here at the Land's End, where great seas confound their waters! I thought of that strange suggestion of one (James Hinton) who has lately passed from us—that, as atoms we name inorganic are compelled, by some unknown power, to resist the law of chemical affinity, and combine into vital organisms—into human bodies, whereunto pertains consciousness and thought—so those world-atoms of the void yonder, together with this our own world-atom, may form greater living organisms endued with grander thought. Then should we ourselves be to these as the living monads of our own blood, as the parasites of our own tissues are to us. And then I thought further of recent investigations into the nature of ultimate elementary atoms by Thomson, Clerk-Maxwell, and Clifford; how these hypothetic entities pulsate and radiate, whirl and travel, just like planets and suns. May not these too be worlds with life and thought on them, if one could only comprehend? The infinitely small baffles no less than the infinitely great; yet, as planets and suns are themselves inorganic, so still would be those atoms of oxygen, hydrogen, carbon, that form animal and human frames. What rational, vital unity then pervades solid granite rocks, the

Atlantic that rebels against their boundary, solar systems yonder, and ourselves who wonder!

Later, in rough weather, I came here from Penzance (a warm, pretty place, with an excellent library), and never saw anything more magnificent than the Atlantic in his equinoctial wrath, as displayed at "dark Bolerium, place of storms." The white surges rose bodily and slowly, as with some awful deliberation, up the rock on which the light-house stands, and along the high rock-married structure, swallowing the whole solid mass, more than a hundred feet of granite, shrouding it from sight, the phantom armour of white water (not spray, solid water!) meeting above the lanthorn in a pointed flame, and redescending. You should climb to the very extreme point, and stand on a ledge of granite, if the direction of the wind permit the water to be carried somewhat away,—then will you behold solid moving mountains of dark bulk, of uncertain wavering ridge, following one another, their emerald crests smoking, heavily arching over in loud ruin upon where shadow grows in hollows under their altitudes impending! What Niagaras, and Mosioa-tunyas thundering upwards against sable island fortresses will you witness!—all under low drifting storm-rack, in a dun rush of blown rain, wind, and ocean confounding their tremendous sound together. But under these raging waves, they say, lies the fair land of Lyonesse, where fell King Arthur when—

"All day long the noise of battle rolled
Among the mountains by the winter sea."

In one place there is a tract of pale sand left in the midst of the sea at low tide, around which the water, emerald green in sunlight, paler beryl in misty weather, slowly sweeps. Through the mist one dimly discerns vast languid wreaths of spent foam, floating "many a rood" on the leaden wilderness.

How different the aspect of all when we strolled along

the coast to Porthcurnow on that fine day in late summer, and looked down from many a beetling crag! The emerald clearness of those deep waters, undisturbed by storm, is delicious, and you long to be ever plunging for a swim. The "innumerable laughter" flashes through wave-worn archways; or misty shadow dims some precipice embayed, where weather-worn semi-columnar granite resembles vast organ-pipes, ocean making music, the "mighty harmonist!" "In some places the granite has the appearance of sable drapery hanging in folds." Turner, the greatest of all landscape painters, has painted these cliffs between Pardenick and Tol Pedn Penwith, than which there are probably none finer in Great Britain. Tol Pedn is the western boundary of Mount's Bay. You suddenly come upon two conical beacons on the down, one red, one black and white, and below there is a round weird fissure of immense depth in the green elastic turf of close thick seathrift, looking down into which you behold a mighty cave, where the sea boils at high tide.

I came once from Porthcurnow, on a rougher day, later in the year, and got a little boat from Porthwarra, though the fishermen refused at first to go with me, saying the cave was dangerous in rough weather. But a stalwart fisherboy thought otherwise, and I got him to land me on a boulder in this grand cavern by taking advantage of an inflowing wave, he backing the boat out instantly to wait for me; so I clambered in till I stood under the fissure. A sea-portal of giants, grim and grand! You need no great imagination to behold a monstrous guardian Genius leaning against the rock to watch you. The mighty boulders are red, black with schorl, and rich brown, rolled smooth as pebble playthings of the giant surge. Dark green cormorants sat upon the rocks close to us as we passed in the boat, and never stirred. Glorious was the swirl of seething emerald between foam-fringed reefs and iron-bound coast; my boy knew every inch of the way, though our cockle of a boat got well

buffeted, and we well wetted. But from the sea these cliffs are utterly magnificent. Castellated piles with pinnacle and spire, built sheer up two hundred feet above the wave, rich-toned, and often royally robed in cloth of gold, lichen of richest yellow gleam. Such is the pile called "Chair Ledder." The fishermen at Porthgwarra, like Cornish fishermen in general, are very fine-looking, bearded fellows, in blue woollen jerseys. These Cornishmen, no longer wreckers, have done many a gallant deed with the lifeboat; but, rather to my horror, on this and another occasion, when there was some possibility of an upset in the course of my Cornish wanderings, the strong, bold fellow who took me out quietly told me he could not swim; so I felt rather guilty for having urged him to go. It is really a disgrace that the seafaring countrymen of Captain Webb should not regularly be trained to become good swimmers.

It was getting dark one day when a poor woman, who keeps one of the little lodging-houses of Porthgwarra, kindly gave me some tea before I went on to my destination in the rain, having put her baby to bed—a sickly child, who was crying in the cradle when I arrived. She told me it had been born after the death of her husband, a splendid young fisherman, who was drowned, not many months before, a very little way from shore, in her very sight. She and others were watching when the brown-sailed craft disappeared. Bitterly she cried as she spoke; and all the while, through chill twilight, the bell on the Rundlestone, a mile away at sea, was solemnly tolling, like a passing bell, as the wild waves leapt up to ring it. This is a romantic little place, with its rock-tunnel and its windlass high in the rock for drawing up the boats. Travelling from the Land's End, you come next to the small church of St. Levan, solitary, grey, and sad, where there are quaint oak carvings, a grey Celtic stone cross, and old lich-stones for resting coffins on at the churchyard gate. Beneath it is Porthchapel, a little shelly cove, where I often swam; like

Porthcurnow, one of the most fairy-like spots imaginable. These two coves are filled with shells instead of sand—millions of minute shells of loveliest form, some perfect, some triturated, each representing an innocent, happy life; tiny fairy-like pink and orange pectens, palmer shells, little pearly cowries, frail white shining shells, like shed flower petals, smooth patellas, streaked with turquoise, and other microscopic “miracles of design,” tinted as Bohemian glass, and variegated.

There can be no stain in a wave that breaks upon such a shore—it shelves down speedily; there is usually bright silver foam around the blushing felspar, and a heave of the billow here; looking downward, you see shadowy fish moving in the crystal, and as you float or swim, the green wave-line shifts against blue air; you note a shell-floor gleaming restless beneath; not a dint is there on the pale, smooth yellow strand, all unfooted unless by elves, only rippled into loose lines by feet of toying wavelets. Then there are limpid pools, with acorn-shells and sea-anemones in clefts of the rock where you may wash your feet free from shelliness, near which too you may dry yourself in the sun—tints of the laver, corallines, and free-floating feathery seaweed, amber, green, purple being often therein beautiful. It is a pleasure to be tumbled in the sand by these billows, with their sun-gleaming, arching necks, their blown crests like cirrus, their murmurous, laughing lace-like foam. Between Porthcurnow and Porthchapel there is a charming cave, hung with leafy lichen, and adorned with pretty fern, *Asplenium marinum*. It is not very difficult of access.

There is now an electric-cable telegraph station at Porthcurnow, and quite a large colony of officials. But one of the finest sweeps of coast I know is the portion from Porthcurnow to Treryn Dinas, a headland, and “Cliff Castle,” with the Logan Rock upon it. As you walk along the cliffs toward Treryn Dinas, you have a marvellous amphitheatre of coast before you, its prevailing tint being

rich dark brown, its elevation above the sea considerable, the headlands extremely noble in form. But Treryn, the strange, rhomboidally-weathered, porphyritic cliff-castle, shaggy with byssus, should be seen in storm, or when Atlantic mists are driving wildly over the moors. Startling and weird is then the huge block called "Giant's Quoit;" and all the headlands, with the great rock-peninsula itself, loom like phantoms, their sombre skirts and iron feet only unshrouded, lashed by great long ridges of surging surf. I climbed to the summit of the Castle Rock, and on returning the crystal-cloven granite head of it seemed strangely like a monstrous crocodile's, gazing straight up among low, scudding storm-clouds. In truth, you are always coming upon some monstrous animal in stone here—toad, frog, huge saurian, "dragons of the prime." The so-called "Giant's Chairs" on this pile, thought by Borlase to be Druidical, are probably the work of weather only, but may have been made use of in Druid rites for all that. Strikingly in keeping with the character of the county are the rude cromlechs, stone circles, stone pillars, kistvaens, old grey crosses, and sepulchral carsns. Indeed, it is hardly possible to be sure which is man's work and which is Nature's, so ruinous and rude are primitive monuments here, so imitative of human work the sculpture of everlasting elements. One calls these erupted volcanic masses the huge tombstones of those Titans who once ruled earth—fiery Vapours—before life in herb or animal yet was.

This is the cradle-land of our giants, of our nursery stories, of Jack the Giant-killer, Tregeagle, and all the brood. Two giants lived at the Logan Rock, and pitched about great boulders at one another; one stepped from St. Michael's Mount to Tol Pedn. How healthful and exhilarating are briny wind and savour of turbulent sea, when rain and spray blow in your face, as you watch the billows bursting! At such times there is a strange sound often mingled with voice of wind and water, as of shrill, alarmed

quasi-human cries, borne fitfully on the gust as if they warned of danger. I do not know what it is, but I constantly hear it when alone, oftenest while swimming. Can this be what makes the fishermen think that the drowned haunt these stormy cliffs? for they have at night some dread of passing along them. Yet wind sings a wild song among the boulders, and white whirled sea-gulls cry. What thunderous bellowing, what muffled explosions in recesses and caves unseen! Far away around the coast waves climb silently, white and ghostly—the cannon-smoke of ocean-war—loud reports accompanying discharges near at hand. When the billows leap over bluff islets detached from shore, they seem beautiful snowy plumes growing to overshadow them.

I also took up my quarters for nearly ten days at the Lizard, at Mr. Hill's comfortable little hotel, whence I issued forth every morning for a tramp, generally with David Roberts, an excellent, intelligent guide, and a thorough good fellow. Anything more beautiful and unique than Kynance Cave is, of course, not to be found—but that is a truism; only I suppose fewer Englishmen know Kynance, Clovelly, and Lynton than know the Rhine, which, at least in the hurried, conventional way they see it, is hardly so beautiful. A very palace of the sea-fairies is Kynance, the material of which it is a perfect luxury to behold—crimson fire burning in the heart of it, mottled green of many shades, often streaked, and veined with a porcelain-like substance called steatite, or flecked with brown diallage, and jade. These marbles (which appear to me almost more beautiful than any I have seen in Italy or elsewhere, and which ought to be a thousand times more used for ornament and architecture) you find wrought into fantastic grotts, with soft floor of yellow sand, where lie shadows and penumbras, from whose recesses you look upon flashing green billows heaving against gem-like isolated pillars of serpentine, or portals, and rude tumbled masses

of the same. What glorious prodigality of costly ruin fallen from beautiful cliffs! I duly examined the "Devil's Bellows," where mingled air and spray are vehemently expelled from a small hole in Asparagus Island by the influx of a wave into a cavern on the opposite side; the noise is precisely like the noise you often hear on a steamer when she is rolling heavily. Then I ascended and descended to the "Devil's Throat," rather difficult of access, though Mr. Wilkie Collins's very graphic account of the place is a trifle sensational, if extremely amusing. You look down into a ghastly black pit, and far beneath in the darkness a dun-grey water wanders imprisoned, and bellows foaming like a caged beast. By peering in you can just make out a spark of light, where the sea enters a long way off. A dismal infernal region! On coming down from Asparagus Island I had a splendid swim, much against the alarmed remonstrances of Roberts, who, though a much better climber than myself, and a brave lifeboat volunteer, as usual with these fine Cornish coast people, knew comparatively little about swimming. The breakers were indeed somewhat formidable, for it was a rough day, and the waves are compressed into a narrow space here, clashing together from opposite cliffs, so that the walls of water toppling over one's head are somewhat heavy, and provocative of headache; for near in shore you cannot completely dodge them by diving through; but once out at sea, I was all right, only that, owing to the tide, I was longer getting back than I bargained for, being a good deal drifted; but Roberts shouted directions to me where to make for, since I could not very well see the little cove of sand, which was hidden by high waves. I had a party of tourists for amused spectators.

Next day I proposed to Roberts to take me up the Gull Rock, which is a fine bold mass of serpentine beyond Asparagus Island. Here strangers seldom go, though some of the young men of the place think little of the climb.

There is a chasm dividing the two islands. It is quite narrow, and in fine weather nothing can be easier than to spring across; but I never got one calm day at the Lizard, and the seas come boiling in between these rocks from both openings of the strait, completely sweeping over the spots where you have to jump from and to, the interval of time wherein the space is left clear being very limited. Of course the tide must be low. But a young man was drowned here not long ago getting over. However, we got across all right, and began our climb. I availed myself of Roberts's help considerably, for it is a really difficult one; at one place you have to trust to adhering hands and knees, there being no cracks whatever. I moreover ignominiously stopped short of the final peak, we not having ropes with us; but with ropes and two guides the summit would be practicable enough even to us humbler members of the Alpine Club. However, I was not in training, and had been till lately incapacitated by illness from climbing at all. Roberts went to the top, and threw me down a gull's nest. Yet from the ledge below the top, the view is simply magnificent—of the romantic cave in Asparagus Island that occasions the Devil's Blowhole; of the grand Lion Rock, Innis Veau; Old Lizard Head, and the Rill promontory. There is, moreover, just below you the most splendid of all "blow-holes," which in rough weather is absolutely like a geyser. The sea spouts forth in a glorious fountain of water, froth, and steam, right over the opposite rock, with tremendous explosive uproar. On Gull Rock there is abundance of samphire, sea-beet, tree-mallow, etc. When we got down again the tide was flowing fast, and it was not easy to find the chasm clear enough for our leap. We were several times baffled; at last Roberts went, and directly I got a chance I followed. A huge wave gave me a bath up to the knee, but Roberts pulled me up quickly.

After getting my indispensable swim, and refreshments

at the Kynance lodging, kept by Roberts's mother, we went on to "Pigeon's Hugo," a very fine wild cave, now only accessible by water; yet you can get down by a rude track cut in the precipice to within some yards of it. It is a grand, gloomy-looking place, the black hornblende precipices being here perpendicular, two hundred and fifty feet high. Thence I proposed that Roberts should take me to the "Smugglers' Cave," if he happened to know it. This cave is described by the Rev. C. Johns in his charming little book, "A Week at the Lizard," and it has very seldom been visited. But Mr. Johns's account whets one's appetite; especially as he says that in later years he never could get any one to tell him where the cave was, and could not find it himself, though a gentleman (lieutenant of the coastguard then stationed at Cadgewith) had formerly taken him into it.

Some time before, the lieutenant was directed to proceed with his men to this spot, where (it had been ascertained by some fishermen, who from the water had witnessed the mysterious disappearance of a fox among the cliffs) there was a cave with scarcely visible entrance; for here, it was believed, smuggled goods were concealed, and a gang of sheep-stealers had taken up their abode. Arrived at the little hole of an aperture, he asked who would enter first, to which no one responded; for one man armed could have defended the robber's den against an army; the officer, however, led (as he had indeed intended to do), but no one was within: the party only found sheeps' bones and leather, for one of the gang had carried on here the trade of a shoemaker. This cave is close to the Rill on the Kynance side. Roberts told me he did not think any one in the place except himself and his brother (who lately died) knew its whereabouts. But this brother had taken a young gentleman of Penzance in. We scrambled down the cliff, the footing being insecure enough, and wriggled ourselves into the cave feet-foremost with the utmost difficulty; but,

having no candles, we came again next day ; for Roberts said the cave had never been completely explored (and see Mr. Johns's book). Gigantic perpendicular, smooth faces of serpentine, precisely like the verd-antique Italian marble, veined with steatite, and great masses of crimson rock, rolled from above, all piled in confusion near the wash of restless seas, render the scene here a splendid one. Mr. Johns in his last edition (1874) states that he was told the cave was only accessible by water. That is a mistake ; but when he was in it, it was well lighted by the rays of the sun, which were streaming in through a narrow fissure extending many feet along the roof, whereas now all is pitch-dark, and the roof has sunk lower. Roberts was in the cave in 1872, and told me there was a pillar supporting the roof where it gets loftier—this, however, we found fallen ; and soon you will have to be as slim as a launce fish before you can get in at all. On a stone we found a paper, almost illegible from damp, with the names of the young gentleman alluded to, and Roberts's brother, together with two small bones placed there by them. Roberts and I, having wriggled ourselves into every crevice of the cave, sat down on a stone in the further chamber ; and he startled me by telling me that, though these two young men were in the cave only a few months previously, both were now dead, the young gentleman having destroyed himself. We found distinct traces of otters here ; on some sand in the shelving corners of the floor, evidently communicating with the sea, fresh excrement and footmarks. Also we found any amount of sheeps' bones, and heard very strange shrill cries now and then, which neither of us could account for. Water trickled down the serpentine walls. Roberts, a dark, fine-looking man, was very picturesque in the light of the taper we held, as he sat on a stone near me telling tales of the cave and its occupants. Two of the gang came to a tragic end. Having ventured to show themselves at Lizard Town, they were pursued by the police, who were on the look-out ;

so they made for Gue Graze, and took to the water there, as is supposed, intending to swim to their old haunt, or secrete themselves in some creek. But the constables summoning them to surrender, they refused; and being kept in sight, they actually swam till both sank from exhaustion. Two of the same gang had also been concerned in a dastardly murder.

Another day I drove to Gunwalloe Church, and walked back along the cliffs to Lizard Town, having visited Mullion Cave on my way to Gunwalloe. On this walk, I had the good fortune to see a chough, hovering with black shiny wings over the cliffs, and making its peculiar cry. Choughs, thanks to the destructive instincts of Englishmen, are rare enough now. Mullion Cave is a very large, and extremely impressive one. At the entrance the red serpentine is polished by constantly trickling water, and of a very beautiful plum colour. At the extreme end of the cave it is well to wait till your eye becomes accustomed to the twilight—that is far better than burning furze, I think. But there was faint smoke hanging about walls and lofty roof, arising from the fires lighted by a party who had preceded me, which produced a very weird effect among the natural buttresses and recesses of this rocky architecture. There seemed to be strange phantoms haunting the gloom, with everlasting stilly sounds of murmurous water in the mountain heart, and solemn low thunder of muffled surge, as though “the mighty Being” breathed at rhythmic intervals without. Seals sometimes inhabit this fine rock-temple—in the winter the floor is all boulders; now it is paved with sand. The light on the polished walls as we emerged reminded me of where light thus shines on black marble processions of gods and goddesses, and old-world princes in bas-relief, as one sees them who emerges from the gloom of sacred passage or chamber in Egyptian temple, half buried in desert sand. Perhaps, however, the colouring of a cave at Polpeer, which may be visited at low water, is still more

beautiful: that seems draped in rich purple velvet. Mr. Johns describes "Dolor Hugo" also as thus tinted; but the weather was so rough that I could neither carry out my cherished project of swimming in as far as possible with a couple of tapers attached to my hat (as I had done into a Sark cave), nor even get very far into it in a boat. Roberts and I rowed a little way in; but so dangerous was the dark swirling water which heaved foaming into its black portal, that we should have been stove in against the rocky abutments had we attempted to proceed further. That day we got the boat from Cadgewith, and were foolish enough to put to sea without looking if there was a plug! So we had the satisfaction of finding ourselves fast filling. I stuffed my handkerchief into the hole, while Roberts pulled as hard as he could to a pilchard-boat lying a short way off, and waiting for a look-out party on shore to give welcome warning of the near presence of a shoal, according to Cornish pilchard-fishery usage. The fishermen furnishing us with a bit of wood, we plugged our hole, and baled vigorously. The rocks along here look black and bold from the sea; yet from the shore they are not near so fine this Cadgewith side of the Lizard Lights as they are the other, the Mullion Rocks being really grand; but Cadgewith is a romantic little fishing village, with a seemingly good small inn, where (being wet one day) I got some hot toddy, and pleasant talk with the host and hostess in the kitchen. The "Frying Pan" is a curious natural archway near Cadgewith, where I found asbestos. There are caves in the grand section of coast between Lynmouth and Lynmouth Foreland (North Devon), and near Ilfracombe, where I think I remember purple velvet robing similar to that of Polpeer and Dolor Hugo.

On the moors here grows the pretty white Cornish heather, *Erica vagans*, and here only I believe. The moors are otherwise desolate enough; yet Landewednack is a very pretty little seaside village, with a pretty old Norman

church embosomed in tamarisk, which grows freely here, and at St. Michael's Mount. But in autumn and winter you have to wade through sheer marshes on the moors. When A—— joined me, I had to take her to Kynance in a carriage, walking in the water being for her out of the question.

I shall conclude with a moonlight scene I witnessed in the course of my solitary stroll one evening. I came round to Polpeer from Old Lizard Head when it was far too dark to be quite pleasant walking on the edge of the cliffs. The brilliant beacons of the two lighthouses were burning yellow and steady against lowering purple cloud; and very near, though somewhat south of these, presently rose the moon, out of the same solid cloud-continent—pale, and veiled in mist—some celestial Ophelia, forlorn and crazed with grief, she seemed, as though vainly mourning for all the life once in her bosom; an extinguished orb, a dream-world wanly wandering, with no heart to move, her vacant face faintly lustrous with the sun; a somnambulist, a wraith; strange fleeting colours appearing dimly in the fleecy fleeting mists around her, as she rose from clouds, like one rising from the grave, paling rocks of the little bay, and changing by her alchemy the ruffled water to coppery silver—a fluctuating tract, now narrower, now wider, and duskier at the margins. Grey cloud interposing, this darkened, leaving only a region of mystic light on far horizons—the travelling wave was as a black wall, ruining over in brassy shifting light, like some mail of bright fish or serpents. Rain now fell; and I, turning, beheld opposite to the moon, once more untrammelled of any palpable vapour, a ghostly rainbow relieved against dull cloud, a pale, misty semblance, a lunar rainbow, colourless—the shadowy cliffs, and dim, solid-seeming sea moaning.

THE END.

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OF THE
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